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At the Eleventh Hour

At the Eleventh Hour

By David Lyall *Author of* 'David Lyall's Love Story' 'The Land o' the Leal' &c.

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At the Eleventh Hour

CHAPTER I

IN the quickly falling dusk of an autumn evening, a woman sat at the lattice-window of a small quaint house, on the banks of Loch Winan in Strathdee. She was of middle age and noble appearance, possessing the look and carriage of a princess, and a face whose beauty was still striking, although time and grief had made many ravages upon it. Her expression in repose was one of deep sadness and there was a listlessness in her attitude not natural to her, but rather the languor of one to whom life had brought weariness and disappointment.

The room in which she sat was small, its furnishings bare and simple; yet there was a certain distinction visible everywhere, a hall-

mark of refinement, the individual touch which Isabel Farquhar set upon everything that came within reach of her influence. The window was open, and although the night air had a chill breath, she did not feel it; her heart was hot and restless, her temples throbbed, and the colour flamed in her cheeks. It was a fair prospect upon which her troubled eyes rested, a great expanse of dark Highland loch with the shimmer of the rising moon on its breast, and the hills rising mightily from its shores, their majestic outline clear against the amber sky. Upon that fair scene Isabel Farquhar had looked many times and in many moods. It had soothed her in some sad hours, it had laid a hush upon a spirit rent by passion, and even now, at the close of a day full of weariness, anticipating another untouched by the brightness of a living hope, the unspeakable beauty of the hour and the place was not without its message of peace. Not a sound broke the perfect stillness of the evening. Half a mile distant the quiet little hamlet of Dee, which stood under the great shadow of its sheltering castle walls, had folded its hands after the toil of the day, and

gathered about its happy firesides, where simple joys made the sunshine of life. From where she sat, Isabel Farquhar could see the turrets of Castle Dee showing in vivid outline against the clear sky. It stood upon a bare hill close to the village, a hill upon which no tree flourished, although the walls were clothed with the tender living green of the ivy which loves such quaint battlements, and gives to them the softening touch they need.

Suddenly Isabel Farquhar's eye was withdrawn from its pensive study of that beautiful picture, by the figure of a man coming up from the Loch side. He walked quickly, like one in haste, almost as if he were pursued. She had no difficulty in recognising her husband, and knowing the errand upon which he had gone forth that night, a sudden fear clutched at her heart, and she sprang involuntarily to her feet. She was standing by the casement, which she had opened to its widest limit, her hand pressed to her throbbing side, her face quite pale, her eyes dilated with a nameless dread. When the approaching figure came within earshot, she leaned out and asked a breathless question.

"Why do you run like that, Hugh, almost as if some one pursued you?"

He gave one fearful glance round, and then with a bound cleared the open window, and stood within the room.

"If I am not pursued now I shall be soon," he said. "I have had my revenge."

Isabel Farquhar closed the window, and her long white characteristic hands did not tremble as she secured the fastening. Then she turned to her husband, and regarded him steadily in silence for a brief space. As far as physique was concerned he scarcely looked fit to be the husband of Isabel Farquhar, yet he could not be called a small man. But there was a lack of strength and manliness in his figure, while his face, in spite of its regular features and fine complexion, had a womanish look, which perhaps did not altogether belie the puny nature of the man. His wife in that steady gaze did not fail to note in him certain unusual signs of agitation. She saw that his blue eyes had a feverish, even a wild gleam in them, that his jaw was set more firmly than was common, also that his tapering fingers

worked convulsively as if they longed for action.

"What have you done?" she asked in a hollow whisper, but her look was so commanding that he instantly obeyed it.

"Done? I've given Strathdee his quietus; at least, I hope so."

"What?" she echoed, and her voice rose from a whisper almost to a shrill cry. "Have you killed him?"

"I know not," he answered sullenly. "I only know that we have been in grips, and that he fell, and that, though I have been able to walk home, he still lies in the woods of Dee. Oh, you need not look at me so scathingly; it was a fair fight, and though they should hang me twice for it I should never regret it. It is the best ten minutes' work I have done in my life."

"Or the worst," she said. In a moment his words seemed to bring before her eyes the whole consequences of that night's work. She saw him in the hands of the officers of justice, conveyed as a common felon to the dock. She even heard the judge's dread sentence and pictured the last scene of all.

Now, though all love, honour, and respect for the man before her had long since withered in the heart of Isabel Farquhar, she could not face these things calmly. She thought of her son and daughter, who represented to her all the brightness and hope still remaining on the face of the earth, of the curse which the dire calamity of that night would cause to fall upon their innocent heads; she thought of her own name—she, the daughter of an old and honourable race, to suffer the public scandal of the open court. Many sorrows had caused the heart of Isabel Farquhar to wither in its bloom, but though she was a brave woman still, she could not face such an awful future, and in a moment her resolve was taken. She turned upon the braggart creature, who, now that the passion of his rage was spent and the lust of blood had passed from him, seemed to cower before her. If a look could have killed him, he had that moment lain prostrate at her feet.

"Listen to me," she said. "I will never forgive you for this night's work. I bear your name, but I am your wife no longer, yet

because of the miserable tie which has bound us all these years, because of our children, whom God pity and succour, I will help you to escape. Together we must flee this very night. Now listen; you will obey me implicitly, or all will be lost."

"Of course I shall obey," said Hugh Farquhar with a wretched, feeble attempt at a smile. "You have a way of making people do what you want, but I don't see how it's to be managed, really."

"Leave everything to me," she said. "What you have to do now is to go upstairs, change your dress and put a few necessary articles in a portmanteau. Have you any money?"

"A few pounds, but there is some in the cash-box upstairs, I believe."

"Then when you have made ready," she said, growing more alert and energetic as the need for action was pressed more strongly home to her, "you will go and put the mare into the dog-cart, then we shall drive together to Altnacaple. We shall be in time, I think, to catch the last train for the south."

"And then!" he asked feverishly.

"Oh, ask me no more," she said with a gesture of passion. "Go! You must know as well as I that every moment lessens your chance."

For the next half-hour they did not see each other. During that time neither was idle. With her own hands Isabel Farquhar packed some things for her own use, carefully gathered every available coin in the house, together with a few articles which she prized, chiefly relics of another and happier life. Then, when she had donned her bonnet and cloak, she called to her the faithful serving-woman who had come with her from her father's house.

"Listen to me, Anne Gordon," she said, commanding herself by an effort, yet sufficiently to speak in an entirely matter-of-fact voice. "A fearful trouble has fallen upon this house. We have got very bad news from Glasgow, bad news of Mr. Hamish. God forgive me this lie," she whispered in her heart. "Mr. Farquhar and I must go immediately. We have not even time to send to the village for Mac to drive us. We are going now to Altnacaple Station, and will leave the trap at

the inn all night; see that Mac goes to fetch it back in the morning. Good-bye, Anne, if we never meet again, may God reward you for your loving service to me and mine, and oh, may He have pity on this fallen and dishonoured house."

"Oh, my lady," cried the faithful soul in a distressed voice, "what has happened to our dear Mr. Hamish?"

"What has happened is too terrible for me to tell you now, Anne," said Mrs. Farquhar as she clasped the old woman's hand in hers. "You will know it all soon enough, and probably before another day dawns. Good-bye, God only knows when and in what circumstances we shall meet again."

So saying, she wrung her faithful servant's hand once more and made haste to the trap in which her husband already sat, waiting impatiently for her coming. He had now awakened to the full realisation of his position; if he had not been guilty of actual murder, yet the affair was grave enough to make him dread its consequences, and he whipped up the willing steed until it flew like the wind along the smooth level road by Loch Winan. Of a

set purpose he avoided the Dee village; his wife, crouching by his side with her head bent upon her breast, only once looked back as they came to a turn on the road which would presently hide the Strath of Dee from her eyes, probably for ever.

The moon was now riding high in the heavens, and the full white radiance shimmering on the heaving waters of the Loch had touched also the grey-green turrets of Castle Dee, where a solitary light shone, but not the light which Isabel Farquhar had often watched from her own casement window, a light which had done something to mutely cheer her upon her solitary way. After that long look she hid her face again, and no word, good or bad, passed between husband and wife until they drew near to the far-off village and railway station of Altnacaple. Then, and then only, did Isabel Farquhar raise her head. She had left the old life behind, the new beckoned her; whither, God alone knew. She drew a long breath of relief as she saw that, though the train was signalled from the last station, five miles distant, they would reach the platform in ample time. She shuddered as she thought

what might have happened had they failed to reach the station in time.

The Caple Arms, one of the old-fashioned Highland hostelries, stood in an open courtyard directly opposite the railway station, so that they at once got rid of their conveyance. No surprise was expressed by the proprietor when Mrs. Farquhar briefly explained that bad news from their son had summoned them to the western city, and that their groom would come over in the morning to take back the horse and trap. Within five minutes the south-going train rolled heavily up to the platform, and the two entered a first-class compartment, and so entered upon the first stage of their strange flight.

CHAPTER II

THE presence of other passengers in the compartment prevented them from having any speech with each other during the journey. The enforced silence, however, was grateful to Isabel Farquhar, and though she leaned back with her weary eyes closed, her long lashes sweeping her cheek pale with anxiety and excitement, her thoughts whirled in ceaseless activity. She had indeed much to think of. Right well she knew that the whole burden of the desolate future would rest upon her. They were fleeing from justice, and it was she who must guide their flight, and bring it, if it were possible, to a successful conclusion.

Altnacaple was distant three hours by express train from Glasgow, which they reached shortly after ten o'clock. Farquhar, now that the passion of his anger had fallen away from him, looked the poor weak creature he was. He

gave himself up entirely into his wife's hands, asking no questions, but following her meekly like a dog. It had been her intention to pass the night in the hotel at the station, but a casual question addressed to the porter who handled their luggage elicited the unexpected information that a train was about to leave for the south. Leaving the porter's side she stepped up to her husband, who was standing listlessly looking about him with the manner of a man who had but a faint and shadowy interest in what was passing around him.

"There is a London train going within a quarter of an hour," she whispered hurriedly. "We must take it."

He turned to her in some surprise.

"But we shall not see Hamish. I thought that was the object of our coming here."

"Did you?" For the life of her she could not suppress a glance of swift scorn. "That would be to betray ourselves indeed. So far as we are concerned, after to-night Hamish and Myra will be as if they had no parents." Some of the concentrated bitterness of which her heart was full betrayed itself into the tones of her voice, but her husband listened to it

unmoved. He looked indeed somewhat like a man in a stupor; the events of the past few hours had been so unusual and so rapid that they had somewhat confused him. Seeing his mental state, and knowing that all responsibility of action rested upon her, she made haste to the booking-office and took their tickets. Within five minutes they were seated in a compartment where the guard assured them they would not be disturbed. It was not a busy season of the year, and the south-going trains were neither heavy nor unpunctual. As they glided slowly out of the station, Isabel Farquhar drew a distinct breath of relief. She carefully pulled down the blinds, and laying aside her heavy cloak, she sat down directly facing her husband.

"Now we can talk," she said, and there was no escape from her piercing eyes. "I want to hear everything that transpired between you and Strathdee from the moment you left the house until you returned to it."

"You want to know too much," he answered sullenly. "I told you what had happened; it is enough."

"God knows it is for most purposes," she

answered, "but as it happens I wish to know something more, and I will know it, Hugh, so you may as well begin now."

He shifted uneasily in his seat. Now that his anger had cooled, and he saw his own act and its fatal consequences in the light of reason and common sense, he regretted his folly. He had imagined himself aggrieved, and had grumbled much against a position which, however, his act of folly had now only rendered desperate.

"Let me help you," she said steadily when she observed in him a reluctance to begin. "You went out of the house, as I understood, to pick a quarrel wlth Lord Strathdee about a mere punctilio. If he wanted the few acres lying conveniently to his own lands, what mattered it; you might have given them to him gracefully. They are hungry enough in all conscience. I don't suppose they would give a dozen sheep fodder the winter through."

"It was not the mere question of the land, Isabel, as you know right well," he answered doggedly. "His claim on the Port-na-carry road is of a piece with his iniquitous treat-

ment of me for the last twenty years. It was the proverbial last straw; but I shouldn't have touched him, I believe, if he had not enraged me by something he said about you."

"That is quite possible," answered Isabel Farquhar. "The sting would probably be in its truth. But I want to know how you came to be in the Dee woods. I understood that you went out to seek an interview with Lord Strathdee at the castle."

"So I did, but he was out, they told me, and directed me to the woods."

"So that, had we been foolhardy enough to remain at Winans, there would not have been any difficulty in fixing the crime on you; every movement could be traced."

"That may be; I had no object in hiding my action or intention," said Farquhar.

"Well?" she continued in her calm interrogatory voice. "They told you you would find Strathdee in the woods, and you walked on, I suppose, till you found him. What then?"

"Well, I simply told him I should contest his right to Port-na-carry in a court of law.

He sneered at me of course, and said that no lawyer would act for me, and no respectable court would entertain the case for a moment. That was sufficient to madden me, but I kept my temper until he began to try and reason with me, as he called it, in his sneaky parson style. He began to talk of my duty to you and to the children. I asked him then whose fault it was that my son and daughter, as nobly born and better endowed than he, should have to go out into the world to earn their bread."

Isabel Farquhar sat still, looking on the gloomy face of the man before her, wondering at the distorted mental attitude which was unable to discern between the false and the true, the right and the wrong.

"I am amazed again, as I have often been, Hugh," she said somewhat sadly, "that you should have cherished this causeless hatred against your cousin Strathdee all these years. So far as I can judge—and I claim myself competent in most of the affairs of life—I can't for the life of me see wherein he has wronged you."

"I ought to have been Strathdee," said

Hugh Farquhar feverishly, and again his hands involuntarily clenched.

"But he is not responsible for the accident of your birth," she said hastily. "And, even had he been quixotic enough to resign in your favour, you never could have had the title, or enjoyed the full rights of the position. If you could only have reconciled yourself to it, you were much happier as plain Hugh Farquhar of Winans."

"I might even have forgiven him that," he answered, "but in other ways he constantly irritated and humiliated me. For one thing, he has never made any secret of his feelings for you."

"It is certain that he has never obtruded them," said Isabel, and the slow colour again burned in her cheek.

"Not to you, perhaps, because he would not dare. I believe he is a coward at heart."

"You lie, Hugh, and you know it," she answered promptly. "Ian Strathdee is as high-minded and noble a gentleman as ever drew the breath of life."

"Oh yes, according to the feminine notions of honour and high-mindedness," he said

sneeringly. "He has plenty of drivel and sentimental stuff such as women love."

"Stuff which you can neither understand nor appreciate," she made answer with a faint smile of scorn dawning on her proud sweet mouth.

"Oh, of course that's your view," he said, "but to me his assumption of superiority in every way was sickening and insufferable. I was bound to have my revenge one day, and I have got it."

"Yes, the coward's revenge," she supplemented, and her words stung him like a whip.

"You have done a good deal, although you may not think it, to foster my hatred of him," he said. "I have seen you, when you did not dream me observant, drawing mental comparisons between him and me, and always to my discredit. Even in looks you thought him my superior; I have seen it in your face."

"You are very observant," she answered. "But I shall not take the trouble to contradict you. I have been a faithful and devoted wife to you, Hugh Farquhar, for over twenty years, and I have no need now to defend myself or

my honour. But we are far from the point. You quarrelled, then, over your imaginary wrongs; did he or you strike the first blow?"

"I hit him on the mouth with the flat of my hand," said Hugh, and there was a certain wolfish satisfaction in his utterance of these words. "And, of course, though he prides himself upon his amiability and sweet temper, he could not ignore such a challenge. We fought, I think, for a good five minutes, and then he fell heavily to the ground. I left him there, whether dead or alive I know not, neither do I care."

"It is possible that, even if you left him in life," she said, and her face was sharpened by the anguish of her soul, "if he be not found, and that speedily, he may die of exposure. And yet I am here with you, aiding you to escape from the punishment you richly deserve! Truly I am amazed at my own self-sacrifice. But it is only for the sake of Hamish and Myra, you may believe that, because I would spare them, if I could, the stigma of their father's public disgrace."

"And do you really think, Isabel, that you will be able to elude the officers of justice, to

circumvent all the machinery of Scotland Yard? You are a very clever woman, but I doubt if you will be clever enough for that."

"I shall try," she answered, and her lips met in a determined pressure which gave emphasis to her words.

"We are going to London, I suppose; shall we stay there?"

"That is a question to be answered afterwards; everything depends on—on, well, upon the newspapers."

He grasped her meaning at once and winced slightly.

"I knew London in my girlhood. It was a fortunate thing for me that my Aunt Margaret took an interest in the poor before 'slumming' became the fashion. It gave me an insight into their way of life, and a knowledge of their homes and haunts, which, no doubt, I am about to prove to its uttermost value."

"And what about Hamish and Myra?" he asked, keeping his eyes fixed on her face, fascinated by its weird beauty and its unspeakable strength of purpose. He knew himself but as clay in her hands, and that she could do with

him almost as she willed. A spasm crossed her face, and her hand clutched her heart.

"Do not speak of them to me," she answered curtly. "I can bear much, but not that. Leave me in peace. You may believe, at any rate, that they shall not be sacrificed; whatever happens, they must be spared as much as possible. Do you think it is for your sake I have taken this appalling, this suicidal step?" she asked suddenly, roused to swift passion. "I have been your wife for twenty years, but I am so estranged from you in heart that your fate would not occasion me the slightest concern. It is for my children's sake that I would seek to shield you from the consequences of your idiotic folly. If I fail, well then I must fail. I shall wait until I see what the newspapers have to tell me to-morrow. If they tell me that Ian Strathdee is dead by your hand, as I am a living woman speaking to you now, I will never open my lips to you again."

"That will be less a punishment than you think, perhaps," he said, trying to answer her lightly, "since you seldom open them except to scorn and belittle me."

"You know that that is untrue," she an-

swered wearily. "And, even if it were true, my scorn would still fall far short of your deserts. I was a high-spirited, and in some respects a noble creature when you married me, Hugh Farquhar. Look at me now, a broken woman, without joy in the present or hope for the future. It is your work; doubtless you are proud of it."

"Oh, come now, Isabel, when you get on that high horse of yours you ride it to the death," he said uneasily. "It is this manner of speech that drives a man mad. You are so unreasonable, and you expect so much from life."

"If that is so, then no man can say that I have lacked my punishment," she answered bitterly. "Of what use is this recrimination? Let us be done with it. We have more issues at stake than the mere settling of our domestic differences. I will lie down and try to sleep, for the morrow will bring its own responsibilities and cares."

She suited her action to her word, and laid herself down upon the seat with her dressing-bag for a pillow. But sleep was far from her burning and weary eyes. As the great engine

bore them swiftly down to the Lowlands, through the hills and glens made sacred by the blood of the martyrs, her mind knew no cessation of activity, but was busy turning over a thousand plans for a future which stretched before her like a great sea, vast, limitless, unexplored.

CHAPTER III

MYRA FARQUHAR was governess to the three young children of a rich Glasgow merchant, who inhabited a princely mansion he had built for himself within a few miles of the city. She was very happy there, being treated with the utmost consideration and respect. Mrs. Maitland considered herself fortunate in having secured a lady by birth and education to undertake the care of her children, and did her utmost to make the girl feel at home.

Myra Farquhar had inherited much of her mother's strength of character, and was not unfitted by nature to do battle with the world, but though she was as happy as it was possible for her to be as a dependant in the house of a stranger, her heart turned perpetually towards the lonely house on the shores of Loch Winans. Those who have had a happy child-

hood, surrounded by love and care, are never estranged from it, but cherish its memories and sweet associations through all the storm and stress of life to the very end. It is the most priceless heritage we can give to our children, a gift which money cannot buy.

It had been the aim of Isabel Farquhar's life to hide from her children the weaker and baser side of their father's character long after her own love, if indeed it could ever have been dignified by that name, had died. She strove to foster the filial feeling in their hearts. In their earlier years this had not been difficult, because, although selfish and weak, and lacking in most of the qualities that make for manliness and righteousness, Hugh Farquhar could not be actively unkind to any living thing, least of all to his little children whom he loved. But as they grew older, and a clearer and wider vision came to them, it became less easy to gloss over the discrepancies in his character. They knew that, though means were so limited that even the provision of meals became a problem to be solved, he did nothing to better their condition, but idled upon the hills with his gun, or on the Loch with his

rod, while their mother's head ached trying to meet the demands made upon her too slender purse. It had been Isabel Farquhar's habit to speak of her husband to the children as a person whose health forbade him to exert himself too much, as one who required to be taken care of. But there came a time when she knew that it would be difficult to keep up that pleasant fiction, and she therefore welcomed more cheerfully than she might otherwise have done the day on which brother and sister went out into the world to seek their own fortunes. Hamish was employed in the office of Mr. Maitland, and the brother and sister having thus many opportunities of meeting felt their exile less than they might otherwise have done.

The second morning after the strange flight taken by her father and mother, Myra was in the schoolroom waiting for her young charges to come down, when their mother entered, bidding her as usual a cheerful "Good morning." Mrs. Maitland was a large, comfortable, motherly person, who looked well to the ways of her household, and was a true friend to all in trouble. Myra Farquhar had a sincere

respect for her, although she often felt that they were beings of a different order.

"Good morning, my dear," said Mrs. Maitland; her voice was most pleasant always, suggesting goodwill and peace towards all men. "I hoped I should find you alone. There is something in the paper this morning which I thought would interest you—a bit of news from Strathdee."

Myra looked up with swift interest. She was a tall, shapely girl, with her mother's fine features and keen black eyes. She exactly resembled an early portrait of Isabel Farquhar by Raeburn, which hung on the staircase at Winans Lodge. Perhaps the characteristic her face lacked most was that of sympathy. It was a hard face, and her eyes would have been more beautiful had they been less keen and swift in their glance. There were many of Mrs. Maitland's friends and neighbours who disapproved of her governess, and openly marvelled that she could keep such an insufferable person in her house.

"News from Strathdee!" she exclaimed in astonishment. "It is seldom anything happens there. What was it?"

"Rather a tragic occurrence," answered Mrs. Maitland. "My husband has just been reading it to me. Lord Strathdee has been found in an unconscious state in his own grounds, and it seems to be the opinion that he had been the victim of foul play. He is not expected to recover."

Myra grew suddenly pale, and an apprehension which she could scarcely master seized her heart.

"That is a tragedy indeed," she said, trying to speak lightly. "But I think it likely that it will be an accident. Lord Strathdee is so much beloved that I am sure no one would injure a hair of his head."

"That may be, but that is the opinion given. Of course the details are of the most meagre description, because it seems that his lordship was not discovered until yesterday. The whole Strath seems to be in a state of the most unprecedented excitement."

"May I see the paper, Mrs. Maitland?" asked Myra anxiously.

"Why, certainly, I'll send it up to you. I might have known that you would be interested in it. But it is only a small paragraph;

no doubt we shall get some more details in the evening papers."

At that moment the children came bounding into the room, and after a few words with them, Mrs. Maitland went downstairs. She did not forget to send the newspaper up to the schoolroom, but Myra gleaned very little additional information from it. It was simply, as Mrs. Maitland had said, a short paragraph stating that Lord Strathdee had been found in an unconscious state in his own woods, under circumstances which seemed to point to foul play; no suspicions were mentioned or blame attached to any one. In spite of that, however, Myra was conscious of a strong and painful sense of approaching trouble. She had the utmost difficulty in concentrating her thoughts upon the work of the morning, and her pupils found her absent-minded and less strict than usual.

After the early dinner she asked and obtained permission to go out alone for an hour or two, and took the first train to the city, proceeding at once to the large block of offices in George Square, where the great business of Maitland Brothers was carried on. By the

time she reached her destination she had worked herself up to a fever of excitement.

It was most unusual for any one to call upon the employees during business hours, but she had no hesitation in doing so, knowing that she had but to send her name to Mr. Maitland to remove any difficulty that might be thrown in her way.

She had not waited long in the little anteroom when her brother joined her. She saw from his face that he guessed upon what errand she had come.

"You know what has happened to Lord Strathdee, Hamish," she said at once. "I feel so anxious, that I could not wait without seeing you. Oh, do you think that papa can have had anything to do with it?"

Now Hamish Farquhar was a young man who took life lightly, and who did not suffer himself to be depressed by any ordinary occurrence; he therefore laughed aloud at his sister's apprehension.

"I just thought you'd be getting some such stupid idea into your head," he answered. "I've been thinking it out myself, and I don't

see that the governor would have anything to gain by pitching into Strathdee. Therefore you may take it from me that he's got too much common-sense to give himself away so entirely. Besides, though they have never pulled in the same boat, Myra, I don't think it has ever got to such a pitch as that."

Myra was scarcely reassured by these remarks. She knew the light-hearted and optimistic nature of Hamish, and that he seldom bestowed a serious thought on anything.

"Mother said in her last letter," she said gravely, "that father was very angry with Lord Strathdee about the land just outside Port-na-carry. Lord Strathdee had sent his foresters to fence it in, so that it is now within the boundaries of Strathdee. It really is not a matter of the least consequence, but it seemed to irritate father very much. Just think what a terrible thing it would be if—if they should have come to blows over it."

"Oh, don't worry over it like that, Myra," said Hamish, his boyish face looking quite rueful. "You are always so dead in earnest about everything. It doesn't pay. If you'd

take a leaf from my book, and not worry over anything, you'd be far happier."

"That may be, but I can't," answered the girl, and a shadow made her face look old and sad. "Things lay hold of me. I keep thinking of the unhappy estrangement between father and Lord Strathdee. It seems so needless, and we might have got so much comfort and satisfaction out of neighbourly intercourse with him."

"That's a very shrewd remark, little woman," said Hamish. "But all the same, mind you, although I've nothing to say against Strathdee, I can't help but being sorry for the governor. Just think, Myra, if there had been no Strathdee, we might have been living at the castle now, instead of grubbing on as we are here."

"But what is the use of thinking of that, Hamish?" said Myra, with a touch of impatience. "It is not Lord Strathdee's fault, and I think he has done everything he could for us in the glen. Mother thinks so too."

"Oh, Strathdee has a way of getting round women," said Hamish lightly. "But now I mustn't stay talking to you here. I expect

you'll have a letter from the mater in the morning."

"I hope so. I shall not know much peace of mind until I do hear," said Myra, not much comforted by her interview. "Somehow, I feel that there's going to be trouble, Hamish, worse trouble than we've ever had yet."

"Oh, you always have been a croaker," said the lad lightly. "Why not ask off from Friday to Monday, and take a run up to Winans? I'd go myself, only as I was off last week, I can't presume again."

When Myra stepped into the open street she was arrested by the newsboys shouting their wares at the pitch of their voices. She stood still, and a sickening band seemed to close round her heart as she listened to their shrill cries.

"Supposed murder in the North. Death of Lord Strathdee. Affair shrouded in mystery."

She tried to still the beating of her poor heart and to bring herself to a quieter mood. She bought a paper and, turning it over, read as she walked. She found, as is so often the case, that the contents were much more meagre than the shouting advertisers tried to

make their purchasers believe. But they were grave enough. Lord Strathdee, if not actually dead, was *in extremis*. With a painful eagerness she scanned the brief account of the occurrence, which detailed how Lord Strathdee had been found in his own woods in an unconscious state, evidently resulting from a blow. Traces of a struggle had been found in his immediate vicinity, and the police were very reticent as to what had occurred, and what clues they possessed regarding his assailant. The paragraph closed with the words, "Sensational developments may be expected": words which rang their ominous change in Myra's ears as she found her way to the railway station and sought her way home. By the time she had reached Stonefield her excitement had risen to an uncontrollable pitch, and she felt that only one course was open to her. She inquired at once for Mrs. Maitland, and finding her in the drawing-room, asked if she could be spared for a few days.

"Certainly, my dear, if you wish. I suppose it is this sad affair at Strathdee which has upset you. Do you know Lord Strathdee?"

"He is my father's cousin, Mrs. Maitland," Myra answered, and as she looked at the sympathetic, motherly face, she felt moved to share her trouble. For she was a desolate creature at that moment, and the foundation of things seemed to be slipping from her.

"Your father's cousin, is he indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Maitland, and marvelled that, though Myra Farquhar had been an inmate of her house for two years, she now heard it for the first time. "No wonder you are upset. Had he any enemies?"

"None. He was beloved in Strathdee from end to end," answered the girl, and her voice was full of pain. "If you can spare me, I shall go to-night. I can catch the train at Wiffars Junction and get to Altnacaple by eight o'clock."

"Certainly, my dear; go at once. Wolfe shall drive you to Wiffars, and I hope you will arrive to find matters less serious than you expect."

About eight in the evening Myra arrived at Altnacaple; and she fancied, so ultra-sensitive had she become, that even the few people about the quiet little station looked at her askance.

She stepped swiftly across to the inn and asked for a trap to take her into Winans. While the ostler was busy in the stable she sat down on the seat by the inn door. The soft sweet breath of the evening air, scented by a thousand heather-bells, floated around her, the round green billows of the hills, outlined against the skies, photographed themselves upon her memory; the cry of the curlew calling to his mate across the brown stretches of the moorland lingered long in her ears. When we are strung up by intense feeling, all our senses become strangely sharpened, and nothing escapes them. The landlord of the Caple Inn, sometime farm steward to Lord Strathdee, and well known to Myra since her childhood, did not come to talk to her as was his custom. He knew she was there, and as Myra could see him quite plainly in the bar, she took his singular reticence as another ominous sign.

The young man who drove her was a stranger to her, and she felt no desire for any talk with him. Within an hour the fresh, sturdy hill pony brought them to Strathdee. As they passed the great gates of the castle,

with the lion rampant on the grey stone posts, speech passed the girl's lips for the first time.

"Is Lord Strathdee dead?"

"No, miss," answered the lad stolidly. "At least he was living this morning when the big doctors came out from Glasgow to see him."

CHAPTER IV

MYRA dismissed her conveyance before she entered the village, and stole on foot to Winans by the edge of the moor behind the houses of Dee. She was now without hope. The anguish of her heart was such that she could scarcely bear it in silence. To her strained vision an unnatural and ominous hush seemed to brood on the old white house, about which there was no sign of life. The front door was closed. She anxiously regarded the window of the sitting-room, where so often of an evening her mother was busy with her needlework or book. It was open, and the curtains swayed gently in the evening breeze.

As she came within sight of the doorway Anne Gordon entered the room to close the window, and seeing the girl on the lawn gave a low cry and ran in amazement to the door.

"Mercy upon us, Miss Myra, what is it? Is Mr. Hamish worse?"

Myra started at the question.

"Hamish is quite well, Anne," she answered without thinking. "Where is my mother?"

"She's gone, Miss Myra, to Glasgow, through the bad news of Mr. Hamish. How is my dear lad, that I have nursed on my knee?"

Myra felt her limbs trembling beneath her.

"Let me come in, Anne; I am weak and faint," she cried. "Surely something terrible has happened." As she spoke she followed Anne Gordon into the house, and was glad to sink down upon the oak settle in the hall. In a moment the whole matter was clear to her. The worst had happened, and her father and mother had fled from Winans. Anne Gordon, no fool, but not so quick of comprehension as the younger mind, stood before her, looking perplexed and troubled.

"My father and mother then have gone to Glasgow?" she repeated at length, trying to speak in a matter-of-fact voice.

"Yes, Miss Myra, on Thursday evening. The mistress seemed in sore distress about

Mr. Hamish. She might have been in sorer trouble about something else had she stopped at home."

Myra sat silent a moment, divided in mind whether to trust Anne or not. She saw that suspicion was awakened in the faithful soul's mind, yet, since her mother had withheld her confidence, she hesitated.

"I did not see them. I wish I had stayed. But the newspapers made me fear I knew not what, so I came to see. What do you know about this terrible thing that has happened, Anne? Tell me quickly, for I cannot bear what is in my soul."

"I know nothing, Miss Myra. I have heard much," answered Anne significantly. "It is a pity that the master and mistress went when they did."

"Lord Strathdee is still alive, Anne. The lad who drove me from Altnacaple told me so much."

"If he is alive he is no more, Miss Myra. He was sore hurt, and whether he live or die, Miss Myra, the hand that did it will be cursed in Strathdee."

Myra winced.

"You said you had heard much. Tell me what you have heard, what they say in the glen."

"Miss Myra, I will not be telling you all they say," answered Anne Gordon sorrowfully. "But if you will go back to the town and bid the master and mistress come back quickly, some lying mouths will be shut."

Myra did not speak. A dry sob choked in her throat, and her heart failed her as it had not yet done. The walls seemed to be closing in around her. She rose unsteadily to her feet, pressing her hot hands to her throbbing temples.

"Anne, Anne, I know what they say, that Lord Strathdee fell by my father's hand; and oh, I fear it is true."

"Miss Myra, that I should live to say I fear it too!" echoed Anne, and though there was sorrow in her tone there was relief likewise. An outspoken fear is ever better than a secret dread which eats into the soul. They clasped each other's hands, and for a brief space further speech seemed impossible to either.

"Tell me the worst now, Anne; some par-

ticulars I must have, so that I may think what is best for me to do."

"On Thursday night, after dinner, Miss Myra, the Laird went out. He was in a very ill humour because the dinner was poor, and in the midst of it he heard that Lord Strathdee's men had started to fence in the land at Port-na-carry. He went straight to the castle, they say, and asked for Lord Strathdee, and when they told him he was gone in the woods, he went out to seek him. And that is all any man or woman knows for certain in the glen, though they make stories, and give them out as gospel, more in number than I can tell."

"There can be no doubt, Anne, though it nearly kills me to say it, that my father and mother, fearing the worst, have fled from Winans. But to go to Glasgow, it seems useless and unwise, they can so easily be traced."

"As you have not seen them there, Miss Myra," said Anne shrewdly, "I will be thinking that they have gone on farther. I am amazed that the mistress, who loves justice and truth, should have taken such a step at all."

Myra shivered as if smitten with a sudden chill.

"We never know how we will act in such desperate circumstances, but I think with you that it would have been but wise to wait at least until Lord Strathdee either dies or shows some sign of recovery."

Anne hesitated a moment and then spoke out yet more freely.

"Miss Myra, it is only right to tell you that the police have begun their investigations, and that yesterday, on whose authority I don't know, they searched this house from top to bottom. And the sergeant questioned me as if I had been in the court, but I was able for him, and I just said to myself, 'It isn't much Anne Gordon will be telling you, my man, to her mistress's hurt.'"

Myra faintly smiled. It was something, in the midst of such chaos and despair, to know of one faithful heart upon whose fidelity she could rely.

"And—did they—did they say that they would seek my father?"

"I did not ask them, Miss Myra, but I heard that they have been at Altnacaple and found

out from Walter Chisholm what train they went by, and I have heard no more."

It was enough, Myra thought as she wearily ascended the stairs and entered her mother's bedroom. It was orderly and in readiness for the absent inmates. It had a quaint octagon window with a low seat running round it. Kneeling on the faded cushions she could see the distant lights of the Castle of Strathdee; all depended on what should happen within its walls during the next few hours, or days at most. Should Lord Strathdee die of the hurt he had received, then nothing could save her father from being hunted down as a murderer.

As she knelt down to make some plan for the uncertain future, she suddenly saw two flashing lights moving from the direction of the castle. She knew that it was a trap of some sort, and her quick apprehension made her surmise that it was Dr. Macphail returning from his evening visit to Lord Strathdee.

It was now nearly ten o'clock, and by that hour most of the inhabitants of Dee would be sound asleep. She hesitated a moment, and then, knowing that she would obtain from

the doctor the most reliable information regarding the injured man's state, she drew on her cloak again, wrapped a white shawl round her head, and stole through the thick shrubbery at the end of the house to the gate which opened on the Dee road. The doctor's gig was within a hundred yards of the gate when she opened it and stood out upon the footpath so that he might see her. Her white shawl served to make her figure conspicuous, and the doctor at once observed it.

"What's that at Winans gate, Duncan?" he said gruffly.

"I'm not sure, sir, but I think it looks like Miss Farquhar," answered the man dubiously.

"It is just her," said the doctor. "I wonder when she came. Draw up, will you, till I speak to her."

He was out of the gig almost before the impatient horse, anxious to get home to his stable, had been brought to a standstill.

"I hope you'll excuse me stopping you, Dr. Macphail," said Myra apologetically. "I saw your lights from the window, and I came down just to ask you a question."

"All right, my dear," said the old man, expressing no surprise. "When did you come?"

"Only to-night; but before we say another word, tell me first whether Lord Strathdee is likely to recover."

"Ah! that no man can tell," said the doctor gravely; "though there is not a man, woman, or child in the glen but hopes he will."

"Has he recovered consciousness yet?"

"Not yet," answered the doctor, and he looked with some pity at the white, haggard face of Myra Farquhar. There was no need for him to ask a single question. He knew the dread that was in her heart, and what had brought her there. "Malcolm is staying the night at the castle. It is not safe that his lordship should be left for a single moment, and though nurses are very good, there is something else wanted in this case besides good nursing."

"The lad at the Caple Inn told me that some doctors had been out from Glasgow this morning," said Myra feverishly. "What did they say?"

The old doctor shook his head and shrugged his shoulders.

"What could they say, my dear? They let on that they know a lot, but when it comes to a mystery like this they are not much better than the country doctors they despise. They could do very little when they came this morning, and were very glad to pocket their fees and leave Malcolm and me to battle with the case."

"Does Malcolm think he will recover?" asked Myra with the same feverish eagerness.

"We know not what to think, Myra; stranger things have happened, but no man can deny that Lord Strathdee is in a most critical state. Just wait a moment, and I'll send Duncan home. I will come in with you, Myra; I shall be glad of a mouthful of whisky while we talk over this sad business."

CHAPTER V

RELIEVED and yet conscious of a strange new dread, Myra hastened into the house, the doctor following her, after he had given the man his orders. Dr. Macphail was an old friend of the family, he had known Myra since the snowy January morning when she had first opened her eyes upon Strathdee. She knew that for the sake of the long friendship between the two families he would help her in this sad crisis of her life. She busied herself getting from the sideboard the refreshment for which the doctor had asked. It was seldom he touched any stimulant in his working hours, and Myra took this as a sign that he was much troubled in mind.

Dr. Macphail was a plain, blunt Scotchman, who had been born and reared in the neighbouring glen. He was accustomed to look things straightly in the face, and to mince

you have come, Myra, what do you mean to do?"

"I will stay here," said Myra with a faint dreary smile, "and wait further developments."

The doctor regarded her compassionately. He saw no hope in the future, and expected nothing but immediate and lasting disgrace to fall upon the house of Farquhar. There was something unspeakably pathetic in the thought of the lonely girl waiting solitary in the deserted house, waiting till the last sad act of the drama should be played.

"If Lord Strathdee should recover," said Myra at length, giving voice to the one hope which offered a ray of brightness, "it may be that for my mother's sake he would not seek to prosecute my father, at least not with the full rigour of the law. He might even say it had been an accident."

"He might," said the doctor. "But I think the chances are against his recovery in the first instance, and against his taking a more lenient view even if he should recover. You know as well as I, Myra, that for the last twenty years your father has done nothing but provoke

Strathdee. He has cherished a causeless hatred against him, and made his life a burden to him in a thousand ways. Lord Strathdee is one of the best of men; had he not been so this tragedy might have happened any time within the last twenty years."

Myra was silent: she could not deny a word that was said.

"Are you going to stop here by yourself, lassie?" said the doctor then, his keen eye dwelling with the most fatherly compassion on the girl's anxious, distressed face.

"In the meantime I shall stay," she answered quietly.

"Have you left your situation, then?"

"No, but I will write to Mrs. Maitland explaining that I cannot return in the meantime; if she feels that she must fill up my place, why, then I can't help it. I have a strange feeling that I shall never go back, that my life is to be different from what it has been yet."

"God help you, lassie," said the doctor, with genuine emotion in his tone. He did not linger much longer—there was nothing to be got from talking over the unhappy affair.

They knew that everything depended on what happened within the next few days in the castle of Strathdee.

Myra remained alone in the old house, and no one came near her save the old doctor, who occasionally looked in as he passed to and fro from the castle. News in country places travels fast, so it was quite well known in Dee that Myra was alone at Winans Lodge, but no one came near her to cheer her loneliness or speak a word of comfort to her aching heart. This was accounted for, of course, by the universal indignation felt at what had happened to Lord Strathdee. He was beloved from one end of the glen to the other, and the result of the terrible thing which had befallen him was awaited with the keenest anxiety. During these days of enforced loneliness, Myra had ample time to think and plan for the future. She was a girl who had few friends, her nature being reserved and reticent. She had a strange feeling that for the future she must look entirely to herself. One resolve, however, she took, a resolve which partook of the nature of a vow, that wherever her mother had hidden herself she should find her, and

help her to bear the burden of shame which had come upon her. The love for her mother was the ruling passion of Myra Farquhar's life. How deep a hold it had upon her she had not known until this swift and unlooked-for separation. It was all the more powerful and absorbing because it found but little voice. She belonged to a race who regarded the expression of any strong feeling as a sign of weakness; great sorrows were borne without a murmur, and the vicissitudes of life seemed powerless to rob them of their self-control.

The time Myra spent in Winans Lodge partook of the nature of a preparation for bidding a long farewell to the place. She went over the whole house, making a patient and methodical inventory of its contents. It was poor and shabby in some respects, but it contained many interesting things and some valuable ones. These she carefully placed under lock and key pending her decision regarding her own fate. After carefully considering the matter she had finally written to Mrs. Maitland, saying that she should not be able to resume her duties in her household; that lady replied, politely expressing her

sympathy, and that part of Myra's life closed without regret on either side.

Hamish wrote various letters in his usual airy and cheerful style, letters of which his sister took but small notice. She was very fond of him in a quiet fashion, but it was impossible for her to regard him seriously or consult him in any important undertaking. What she had in view she must herself carry out to the end, without taking account of Hamish.

The week passed slowly away, and on the Sunday evening Dr. Macphail stopped his trap, as he had done many times during the past week, at the gate of Winans Lodge. Myra was watching for him, and ran across the lawn to meet him, in the hope that he brought with him some better tidings.

"Well, my dear, there has been a little change," he said, answering her anxious questioning look at once. "I believe that he is going to pull through, after all."

"Has he recovered consciousness?" she asked breathlessly.

"He has shown some sign of it. I think he will recover, and Malcolm thinks so too."

"Thank God," said Myra under her breath; and the earnestness with which she spoke showed the old man that it was indeed a matter of life and death to her.

"Has he spoken?" she asked then.

"Oh no, and will not for some time, I expect. Even if he should recover it will be a long time before Lord Strathdee is the man he was, if, indeed, he will ever be."

"Oh, perhaps he will recover more completely than you think," said Myra almost brightly. Now that there was even a ray of hope held out to her nothing else seemed greatly to matter.

"I suppose you have heard nothing of your father and mother," he said abruptly.

Myra shook her head.

"They have got clean away," said the doctor musingly. "The more I think of it, the more amazing it seems to me. The officers of the law are not quite so clever as they make out. There are a good many undiscovered crimes, as well as unpunished offenders in our midst."

"Well, but, Dr. Macphail, if Lord Strathdee recovers there would be no need for my father

and mother to remain in exile. I am sure that he will forgive him—he has forgiven him a great deal, much more than you or anybody knows, I have heard my mother say so."

"I could believe that, Myra, but at the same time there are some things that are almost beyond forgiveness, and I think this is one. But there, there is no use in discussing the matter just now. What I want to be at is what you are going to do. Malcolm and I are wae for you living at Winans by yourself. It can't go on, my dear."

"I am going to wait," said Myra calmly, "until Lord Strathdee is well enough to see me; then, when I have seen him, I will go out and find my father and mother, and bring them back."

"It's a bold programme, my dear," said the old man; but he looked at the firm, determined young face with an admiration he did not seek to hide.

"And what, may I ask, is Hamish about that you are left here to face everything yourself?"

A slight flush rose to the girl's cheek.

"Hamish writes me a great many letters,

doctor, but he will not come to Winans as long as this cloud is on it. He is right, of course, from a worldly-wise point of view, and I don't think anyhow that I want to see him just now."

A dry smile touched the old man's lips. He had known the brother and sister from their infancy, and well knew that they were cast in entirely different moulds.

"I know that we can trust Hamish to look after No. 1, Myra," he said, "but, all the same, it's not very fair. He is the one that should be bearing the brunt, and not you."

CHAPTER VI

THE room in which the master of Strathdee lay so mortally stricken commanded a prospect wide enough and fair enough to gladden the eyes of any man. The whole valley of the Dee was before the long windows: the winding river with its richly wooded banks; the heather hills with their wonderful purple sheen; the glimmering waters of many a dark mountain loch in the distance, all made up a picture almost beyond compare. It was a prospect beloved by many artists, although there were few who had been able to grasp at once its wideness and the varied and peculiar charm of its landscape.

At the window of this upper room, within the shadow of the rich damask hangings, a woman sat on a grey and cloudy afternoon, watching the rain-clouds slowly gather on the summits of the surrounding hills. She looked

about five and thirty—her age in reality was forty-two. She had no beauty except a certain carriage and mien which proclaimed her to be a woman of birth. Her face, to which the sweeter joys of life might have imparted some soft outlines, was somewhat harsh and unattractive. She was a lonely woman and a disappointed one, and she was the only kindred save the Farquhars whom Lord Strathdee had upon the face of the earth.

She was his cousin, by name Graham Leslie, and she had hopelessly loved her cousin Strathdee all her life. She had been summoned to his bedside from her home in a distant town because she was his only kindred, and though there were two professional nurses in the house, she was seldom absent from the room. She was alone in it now, and though the tension of the past few days was in some measure relieved, and the patient now slept a natural sleep, there was still cause for the gravest anxiety. The extent of the injuries was not really known as yet, and there were many contingencies which might arise unexpectedly at any moment; though he had now been conscious for forty-eight hours, Lord

Strathdee had never uttered a word, and until he should speak they feared they knew not what.

A slight movement at the bed instantly arrested her, and she rose and glided across the room. It was then seen that her figure was very tall and well proportioned, and that she wore her plain black gown with a consummate grace. She then saw that her kinsman's eyes were wide open, and fixed upon her face with intelligent comprehension.

"You are here, Graham," he said in a low whisper, which, however, was quite clearly and distinctly uttered. "How long have I been in this room?"

"Eight days, Ian," she answered in a quiet, matter-of-fact voice, though her heart beat as she saw once more upon his thoughtful face the well-remembered smile.

"Eight days — that is a long time," he answered feebly. "But I remember distinctly everything that happened. Have they done anything to Farquhar?"

"It was Farquhar, then? Remember, we have only surmised it, Ian: nothing has been known for certain."

"I thought they would have found it out by now. I hope for Isabel's sake they have done nothing to him."

"They might have done, only he has disappeared, Ian," said his cousin cautiously, not assured at all in her own mind whether she ought to permit him to utter a word, but she thought, and wisely, that probably it would excite him much more not to have his questions answered.

"Gone away, have they? Where?"

"That no one knows, Ian. I believe that the police are doing their best to find out."

"Then they may stop," said he, with a feverish eagerness which caused her a sudden alarm. "Do you hear? They may stop their search. Whatever happens to me I decline to prosecute."

"But supposing you had not recovered, Ian," said his cousin, "the matter would have been no longer in your hands. Besides, Hugh Farquhar has done nothing less than persecute you for the last twenty years. You make a mistake, I think, if you let him go unpunished for this last terrible outrage."

"You speak of what you do not understand,

Graham," said the sick man. "Where is Macphail? He ought to have known that nothing would induce me to prosecute Farquhar for anything he might do to me."

"He will be here within an hour, Ian; then you can talk the matter over with him," said Graham, observing a slight flush rising in his cheek, warning her that the excitement must not be carried too far.

"Send for him now," said the sick man feverishly. "I can't wait an hour. You might have known that for Isabel's sake under no circumstances would I make a public example of Farquhar."

Some bitterness gathered slowly in Graham Leslie's eyes. She knew whose image dwelt constant in Ian Strathdee's faithful heart, for whose sake she had been destined to go through life a solitary and lonely woman.

"You must not speak more now, Ian, or I shall be getting into trouble for my carelessness. It will be good news to the glen to hear that you are even so far recovered."

To this Strathdee made no response—he was for the time being a person of one idea. The thought of the woman he had so long

loved, an exile from her home, hiding herself for the sake of the man who had given her so little of the sunshine of life, was hateful and intolerable. He chafed at the miserable weakness which kept him a prisoner to his room and his bed while she was in such straits as these.

A messenger speedily brought Dr. Macphail from his house beyond the Dee bridge. He was not at all surprised at the manner in which his patient received him, nor at the impatience he displayed in regarding all that had happened during the past ten days. It was vain for Dr. Macphail to protest that he was powerless to do anything to bring back those who had fled from Strathdee.

"It's got to be done, I tell you," said the sick man feverishly. "I don't care how, or by whom; but if Farquhar and his wife are not back at Winans within the next three or four days I shall get up myself to look for them."

The doctor turned his head away to hide his smile.

"You're laughing at me, Macphail," said his lordship, quick as a needle. "But I tell you I

am in earnest. What although Farquhar and I had a few words, or even hit out at each other to settle old scores, is that anybody's business but our own? But it's always the same—the police are not at hand when they are badly wanted, but if there is a bit of private business into which they can poke their noses, dressed with a little brief authority, there they are. I want you to send for Colonel Drummond until I tell him exactly what I want to be done; but I think that you might have known, as I said to my cousin a few minutes ago, that nothing on earth would make me prosecute Hugh Farquhar."

"You are a world's wonder," said the old doctor gravely. "He has almost murdered you—we dare not even say that you are out of danger—and yet you speak like that. He has never deserved such consideration at your hands, and it would make us all rejoice to see him get some punishment for the causeless spite he has cherished against you all these years."

"That's my business, and not yours or any other meddling busybody's," fumed Strathdee; and the old doctor forgave him his impatience

because he knew, none better, the large, warm generous heart which beat beneath that hasty speech and manner. As he drove on from Strathdee to the house of Colonel Drummond, the chief magistrate of the district, his entire thoughts were of Isabel Farquhar, who, with the perversity of her kind, had passed by the true, noble, and unselfish love of a man like Ian Strathdee, only to throw herself away on the poor creature who had brought her to such shame.

For a day or two Strathdee seemed to be on the high road to recovery. He acquired strength in a marvellously short space of time, but Dr. Macphail, who watched him with an anxious eye, feared that it was the strength of a nervous agitation and excitement which might have a serious reaction. Time proved him to be right. Hearing from her old friend that Lord Strathdee was so much better, Myra, without saying anything to him, afraid, indeed, lest he should seek to put her past it, took a walk up to the castle in the sweet summer dusk, in the hope that she might get speech with Strathdee himself. Everything she could now do at Winans was done. These long

days of waiting had brought no satisfaction of any kind ; not a line or a sign had come from her father and mother. They had disappeared as completely as if the earth had swallowed them. Nothing now remained for her to do except to go forth in search of them, and though she was impatient to be gone, she felt that she must first speak with Lord Strathdee face to face.

The butler gave a start of surprise as he admitted her. She knew him very well, he was an old servant of the family, absolutely devoted to his master and to the name he bore. Myra did not at all misunderstand the startled, somewhat stern look he gave her—she would have been surprised had he received her otherwise.

"I'll have to ask Miss Leslie before I even take your message to his lordship," he said as he ushered her into the small waiting-room in the hall. "Nobody has seen his lordship as yet."

"I know that," answered Myra quickly. "But my business is very urgent, and I think that if Lord Strathdee knows I am here he will not refuse to see me."

The old man shook his head somewhat dubiously as he left her.

Miss Leslie was in her cousin's room, and when the knock came to the door she opened it herself.

"That is Miss Farquhar, ma'am, from Winans. She's asking to see his lordship, and I didn't know what to be saying to her."

A strange quick flush sprang to Graham Leslie's pale face.

"See his lordship, certainly not! It is preposterous; tell her so in as few words as you like, Diarmid. It is the utmost presumption on her part to ask such a thing."

"Who wants to see me?" called out the sick man, his ears sharpened to a painful clearness.

"It is only some one from the village, Ian," said his cousin in a soothing tone, as she took a step back into the room. "It was highly injudicious and absurd of Diarmid to even bring the message up."

"Who was it?" asked his lordship peremptorily. "You are playing with me,

Graham. It is some one of importance or you would not seem so very indignant over it."

"Well, if you will know you must, I suppose," she said with a kind of reluctant sullenness. "It is Hugh Farquhar's daughter."

"Myra! I will see her at once, of course. Let her come up," said the sick man, in his eagerness trying to raise himself on his pillow.

"I will only let her come up on one condition, Ian—that you will lie down perfectly still, and that you will allow me to remain in the room so that I may prevent the talk becoming too excited. I wish that Dr. Macphail would come in, I am certain that he would not allow you to see her."

"I should not ask his leave, my dear; let her come up at once."

Graham Leslie, not daring to show the anger which she felt, moved to the farthest window and there waited until Diarmid brought the girl upstairs. She turned when she heard the door open, and recognised her by the

most distant bow. But Myra had no eyes for her, her whole interest and concern was with the prostrate figure on the bed. She crossed the room with a tottering step and threw herself on her knees at the bedside.

CHAPTER VII

"OH, Lord Strathdee, what am I to say? How I dare to come into your presence I do not know, but something told me you would see me, and that you would not misunderstand my motive in coming."

He raised himself on his elbow, and there dwelt upon his fine face an indescribable tenderness and compassion. Graham Leslie from the distant window saw that look and it accentuated the bitterness in her soul.

"I am glad you have come, Myra: you are the person next to your mother I would most wish to see. I am a prisoner here, you see, and they will give me no liberty. I have heard from Macphail that you are living alone at Winans. You can write to your father and mother and tell them that, so far as I am concerned, they may come back to-morrow."

"Write!" cried Myra mournfully. "Where

can I write? No man nor woman knows where they have gone, and I think they mean never to come back."

"Oh, we must not think that," he said, trying to speak cheerfully. "Your father and I have had many a tussle in the last twenty years: this one happens to have been a little sharper than any of the others, and that is all. There was no need for such extreme measures on their part. We must put some machinery in motion at once to discover them."

Myra, still upon her knees, regarded the face bent above her with a secret wonder in her shadowed eyes. She had heard and read of those who carried the spirit of Christ into their daily living. She had often thought, since she had been old enough to understand what happened around her and to fathom human motives, that Lord Strathdee came more near to the conception of the divine life than any she had met. He was considered by his compeers to be eccentric and quixotic, because he strove to carry out what they conceived to be impossible lines of thought and conduct. He was a father to the people of Strathdee,

and no provocation or ingratitude seemed to rouse in him a vindictive or a vengeful spirit.

"What are you thinking, Myra?" he asked, struck by the earnestness of her look.

"I was wondering," she answered simply, "why it is that you are so different from all others, and thinking what a different world it would be if there were more like you."

"Get up, my dear, and sit upon a chair where I can see your face, and tell me what you have thought of doing. I understand from Dr. Macphail that you have left your situation in Glasgow."

"Yes, I have: I came off at once when I saw the newspaper report of what had occurred."

"Then you received no communication from Winans concerning it?" asked Strathdee eagerly.

"None. It is now a fortnight since I came here, and I have had no letter from my mother, nor has she written to Hamish. They have disappeared, and I think it is their intention that they should not be discovered."

"Ah, but we shall discover them in spite of that," said Lord Strathdee cheerfully. "It is

not the first time that missing people have been found. Oh, if only I were able to get up from this confounded bed, I should soon have them back in the old place, and I am rather of opinion that after this your father and I should be able to bury the hatchet, as the saying goes. I think all the bad blood has been spilt on this occasion, and, who knows, we might all be happier than we have yet been."

Myra Farquhar was not an emotional person and seldom shed tears, but her eyes grew dim as she listened to these heart-comforting words.

"I only waited until I could see you, Lord Strathdee. Now I am going to seek them. I have a strange feeling that it is in London I shall find them, and I am going there."

"You—alone? It is impossible, Myra," said Lord Strathdee quickly.

"Why is it impossible?" she asked. "I must do something, I can't stop at Winans eating my heart out; besides, where my mother is there is my place, and whether she comes back or not it is my duty to be beside her, to help her and to make life easier for her

if I can. You do not know her—her need of sympathy and love is very great."

A strange shadow swiftly crossed the sick man's face, and the motionless figure in the far window made an impatient movement as if the words stirred some bitter feeling in her heart.

"But you, a young girl, to go away alone and unfriended to a great city, you will be forlorn indeed," said Lord Strathdee.

"I shall be but as many others," answered Myra. "I am not the first woman who has had to fight the battle there, and I shall have something to fight and to live for, remember that. I came to-night," she said after a moment, when no further words fell from his lips, "for a double purpose. To express my heartfelt gratitude that you have even so far recovered. It is too terrible to think what it would have been otherwise."

"Hush! we need not speak of that. And what was the other purpose?"

"To ask if I might take a message to my father if I should find him."

"I have already given it. Say to him that if he will but come back bygones will be by-

gones for ever, and that we need never speak of this unhappy business again; and say to him that if he will but allow me for old times' sake to give him some help, we might yet see the most prosperous and happy days of Winans restored."

A look of painful longing was on the girl's sad face as she rose to her feet.

"I will go now—perhaps I have already stayed too long. Good-bye, Lord Strathdee: it is not for me to thank you, but if prayers are heard and answered in Heaven many rich blessings will descend on your head."

"But stay," he cried impatiently. "You cannot go like this. I must hear more, I must know exactly what you are going to be about in London. I must help you, Myra."

She shook her head.

"No; what I have to do I must do alone. You have already done too much for me and mine. You need not be anxious about me; I have plenty of money and I shall not be quite friendless in London. Good-bye. If I may I will write to you from time to time—perhaps because I shall hope to have a letter in your

own handwriting to say that you have quite recovered."

She took his outstretched hand in hers and raised it to her lips, then, before he could detain her, she had hurried from the room.

"Go after her, Graham," called out Lord Strathdee. "She is a forlorn creature, she wants a kind and sisterly hand stretched out to her."

"I cannot, Ian," came in short, sharp tones from the stern figure in the window. "Never while I live shall I willingly speak a word or extend a friendly hand to any of Hugh Farquhar's kith and kin."

Strathdee knew well the relentless Highland spirit which moved these words, and with a somewhat disappointed look he sank back on his pillow.

Myra's heart was lightened as she retraced her steps to the desolate house of Winans. Anne Gordon, who knew upon what errand she had gone, and who had watched from an upper window from the moment she entered the castle gates until she emerged from them again, met her at the door.

"How did you find his lordship, Miss Myra, and what did he say?"

"He is better, Anne, and I think that he will live. What did he say? I cannot remember the words, Anne, only I know that they were balm to my heart, and that I will go to-morrow with a better hope and courage on my way."

"And is it going you will be to-morrow, Miss Myra?" said the faithful creature as she paused in front of her young mistress with her arms folded somewhat determinedly across her chest.

"Yes, to-morrow morning; Mac will drive me to Altnacaple, and I will never come back, Anne, until I bring my mother with me."

"And what do you suppose is to become of Anne Gordon while you are away on that fine seeking?"

"Oh, you will stay here and take care of the place; it must not be allowed to go to wreck and ruin. You know how she loves it, Anne, and how it would grieve her heart if it was neglected or allowed to go wrong."

"Take me, Miss Myra," cried Anne with a strange pathos in her tone. "I am but a plain and simple old Highland wife, but there is

many a good day's work in me yet, and what am I good for if not to take care of the bairn that I have nursed on my knee? You cannot be going away to that strange and ill place by yourself, Miss Myra: there would be a judgment upon me if I allowed it."

Myra shook her head.

"It is certain that some one must stop here, Anne, to take care of the house. Besides," she added mournfully, "I have not the means that would keep two of us in London. It may be that I shall have to wait some time even before I get something to do."

"But I have money, Miss Myra," cried Anne eagerly. "Good money of my own in the bank at Upper Dee, part that I have saved from the good wages my mistress has never failed to pay, and part that my brother left me when he died and the croft was sold. I have no kith nor kin to spend it on or leave it to—who has a better right to it than them I love, and that have been more than kith and kin to me since ever I came to Winans?"

"Oh, Anne, you make me ashamed," cried Myra, but deep down in her heart it was a

comfortable thought that there was one so willing and able to help her. "I cannot take your money—that would please my mother least of all; but I will promise you this, that if it should be that I am in straits at any time I will not fail to write and ask you to help me. You must see yourself, Anne, that it is necessary that you should remain here, because any day they might come back, and it would never do for my mother to find the house cold and dark and shut up."

"No, it would not," the old woman admitted with some reluctance, "and there is no one else that could be trusted with the place. I see that it must be as you say, Miss Myra, but my heart is heavy concerning you, and I shall never know a moment's peace of mind until I see you back again."

"You will not be left quite alone, Anne, because, no doubt, after all this talk has died down a little, Hamish will come out from time to time to see you."

"He may come, and I will pay him my humble duty, Miss Myra, for his father and mother's sake, but he will never be the same lad to me since he has left you to bear this

trouble alone and has never looked near to ask how things are."

"You must not be too hard on him, Anne," said Myra, but her smile was faint and dreary. "Remember, he is a young man, a young man that has his way to make in the world, and he has no one to look to to help him."

Thus rebuked Anne Gordon held her peace, but she was not convinced. Hamish Farquhar had bitterly disappointed all her expectations, and she seemed to see in him only a craving and self-seeking spirit, which grieved her.

CHAPTER VIII

ISABEL FARQUHAR was no stranger to London. She had been brought up by an aunt whose custom it was to spend a part of every season in a small house in Mayfair. She could have laughed aloud from bitterness of soul that night as they stepped upon the platform at Euston Station and drew a sharp contrast between then and now. Then she had travelled at ease in luxury, taking the journey usually by easy stages, and being met at the terminus by the roomy family coach which had been sent on before them. Now they alighted in haste, no one to welcome or bid them God-speed.

They were glad to hide themselves quickly in the throng, not certain whether the machinery of the law was not already put into working order to secure their capture.

It was a raw, grey morning, with a dreary

rain filtering through the heavy atmosphere, a morning which accorded well with the mood and prospects of the unhappy pair. She was very tired, never once during the long dreary watches of the night had she tasted the blessed oblivion of sleep. All night long her brain had been in a whirl, planning what should be the next act in the strange drama she was playing.

The first thing she did was to buy a newspaper from one of the shouting newsboys, and eagerly scan its contents. It was a relief of course to her to find that there was no report of the occurrence at Strathdee. That brief respite seemed to give her a new courage, and she had a distinctly relieved look on her face as she turned to her husband.

"We are safe so far," she whispered: "there is no report. We have the day before us to find a hiding-place."

She did not mince matters nor choose her words. They were fugitives from justice, and the first step towards safety was that they should fully realise the danger of their position.

"Where are we going?" he asked as she motioned him to a waiting hansom.

"Get in and I will tell you. We have no time to waste talking here."

He obeyed her instantly with the mute, unquestioning dependence upon her which had characterised his whole demeanour since their flight began. He knew that everything depended on her, and that he was but a feeble tool in her hands. He did not catch the address she gave to the driver, but the moment the door was shut and they began to move she turned to him.

"There is a woman I know down in the East End, the daughter of one of Aunt Margaret's pensioners; she will take us in and ask no questions; besides, she knows nobody in Strathdee, she is a Londoner by birth."

"And when we get there, what then?" he asked, marvelling at her resource.

"There we can be quiet for a few days until I have time to think, and until we know what has happened to Strathdee. It will depend entirely on what the newspapers tell us whether we remain in London or not. We may have to go abroad."

"But I don't want to go abroad, Isabel," he said peevishly.

"It is not what you want, Hugh, but what will be necessary to save your neck," she said ruthlessly. "I don't propose that my children's father shall meet his death at the hands of the common hangman if I can avoid it."

"You are brutal, Isabel," he said, and she saw him wince.

"You compel me to be so," she answered. "You don't seem to realise your own danger. If Lord Strathdee is dead — which I am mortally afraid of — nothing can save you. He is so well known a man that even if it were tried it would be impossible to hush it up. The fact that there is no news in the paper this morning makes me fear the worst."

Hugh Farquhar sat motionless and silent by her side as they rattled through the wilderness of streets, just waking to the life of the new day. In saying that he scarcely seemed to realise his danger, she spoke nothing less than the truth. He was in a dazed condition, and the events of the past twenty-

four hours seemed to him part of a strange dream.

After what seemed an interminable journey through the din and traffic of the more important streets, they came to Liverpool Street Station.

"Where are we going now?" asked Farquhar as he saw the huge terminus before them.

"We are going down to the East End, as I told you. We do not drive all the way for two reasons: one is that we cannot afford it, and the other that when they come to follow us they will find it a somewhat difficult task."

She was full of resource; never for a moment did her shrewdness and forethought desert her. It was her children's fair name for which she planned and schemed—if she could but spare them one pang it would be sufficient reward. To the man sitting sullen and wondering by her side she seldom gave a thought. So far as her heart and affection were concerned, he had passed out of her life, and he seemed to realise it now for the first time. At Liverpool Street they took train for

Bromley—they could not have hidden themselves more effectually. It was a place of which Hugh Farquhar had never even heard, the name of it was only known to his wife as the place where an old servant of her aunt's had settled on her marriage.

By the time they reached Bromley it was ten o'clock. The sun was now struggling through the dull sky, and the chill of the early hours had somewhat mellowed. It was quite by accident that Isabel Farquhar had kept this woman's address. She did not even know whether she should find her after the lapse of so many years, but it seemed to her worth a trial.

Christian Morison had been lady's maid to Lady Lundie, and had enjoyed her confidence up to the day of her death. She was a prudent, sensible woman who had never been tempted into any of the ordinary gossip of the servants' hall. She was thus a valuable servant to whom had been accorded many privileges. She knew the whole history of the Lundie family, to which Isabel Farquhar had belonged, and, though she had never seen her since her marriage, she still cherished her in most affectionate remembrance.

Immediately after Lady Lundie's death, Christian Morison with the proceeds of the legacy she had received, set up a small business in the East End. Her husband, a skilled tradesman employed in one of the great shipyards, had been disabled by an accident, and was no longer able for his employment; but he had a good business head, and between them they made a very comfortable livelihood. They had no children, so that they had been enabled to lay past a considerable competency. Christian was now a widow, but still kept on her snug little business, and lived in the comfortable rooms above the shop; and though many had tried to persuade the comely and well-to-do widow to change her estate a second time, she had turned a deaf ear to them all.

She was behind her shop counter as usual, preparing for a busy morning, when a cab rattled up to the door. She came out in some surprise — cabs were not often seen in that unpretentious street, and certainly it was an unprecedented thing for one to stop at Christian Morison's door. But the moment she saw the face at the window she recog-

nised it, and threw up her hands in amazement.

"Mercy upon us, Miss Isabel, is it you?"

"Yes, Christian. We have come to London in some haste, and I could think of no one who would be likely to give us a quiet lodging for a week or two except you. Will you take us in for auld lang syne?"

"Why, yes, certainly," said Christian, without a moment's hesitation. "Come in, come in. Is Mr. Farquhar with you too?" She dropped a little curtsey, a relic of her bygone respect for those above her in station, as she saw a gentleman's face at the window. There was something odd in this sudden and unannounced arrival, but Christian had no doubt that it would be all satisfactorily explained to her; meanwhile she was overjoyed to see her dear Miss Isabel again. They had been girls together in old Lady Lundie's house, and had been a great comfort to one another.

Isabel had not been mistaken in her. It was sufficient for her that they asked the shelter of her house. She had two comfortable rooms directly above the shop, a sitting-room simply and inexpensively furnished, but

having a homely aspect which at once appealed to the heart of the desolate woman who entered it. Here at least she might be at peace for a time, here she would have quiet to breathe and to think. It was the last place where any one would be likely to seek her. She felt more ease of mind than at any moment during the last twelve hours.

Mistress Morison had a young servant maid, who attended to the shop while she prepared a hasty breakfast for her unexpected guests. She was not without her own thoughts as she willingly performed this labour of love. She knew that only misfortune of the most serious kind could have driven Mrs. Farquhar to the simple shelter she could offer, but so deep was her affection and so unbounded her confidence, that she was more than willing to give them of her best without asking a single question.

Having made a good breakfast Hugh Farquhar went into the inner room and threw himself down upon the bed, but sleep was far from the eyes of his wife. She was glad to be alone for a moment with her kind friend, in order that she might in a few words make

clear their position. She had reviewed the whole situation, and had come to the conclusion that it would be better to give Christian Morison her full confidence.

"Of course you must know, Christian, that something has happened to account for this sudden and unlooked-for visit. I want to know first whether you would be willing to keep us here for a few weeks."

"Why, yes, as long as you desire to stay, Miss Isabel," said the good soul. "Excuse me saying Miss Isabel, but it doesn't seem as if I could get my tongue round any other name."

"Call me what you like, Christian. I feel at this moment as if I had no friend on earth but you."

"Oh hush, Miss Isabel, you mustn't say that. You are so changed, as if you had seen a lot of trouble."

"Trouble!" exclaimed Isabel Farquhar, with a note of bitterness in her voice, "I have known nothing but trouble these twenty years, it has been my meat and drink. Trouble, and sorrow, and disappointment I can bear, but now it is disgrace which threatens me and mine."

"Oh I hope not, Miss Isabel," cried Christian in dismay.

"It is nothing less. I must tell you so much at least, Christian, so that you may understand the situation. My husband, whom you to-day see for the first time, is a fugitive from justice."

"No, my lady, I mean Miss Isabel," cried Christian fearfully.

"It is a long story, upon which I cannot enter here. You know that at one time I was to have married Lord Strathdee, but through some treachery we were parted, and I became the wife of his cousin, Hugh Farquhar. There has been a great deal of bitterness between them ever since, or, to put it more correctly, my husband has borne Lord Strathdee a causeless grudge for reasons which it will be easy for you to understand. It has been unfortunate all along that we have been compelled to live so near each other. They have had a good many differences, but last night they came to blows, and my husband left Lord Strathdee for dead in his own woods."

"Oh, Miss Isabel," cried Christian, clasping

her hands in unspeakable dismay. "And you have run away to escape?"

"I have run away at least until the first excitement about the affair has died down, and to save my children the open shame of their father being led away from his home like a common criminal. If Lord Strathdee should really be dead, I don't for a moment suppose that we should be able to elude the officers of the law. One vow I have taken—that they shall not take either of us alive."

The passion and deadly earnestness with which she uttered these words left no doubt in the mind of Christian Morison as to her meaning. She had lived a peaceable and uneventful life in her little suburban shop, free from shocks and untoward happenings of any sort. It was as if she suddenly beheld a volcano yawning and smoking at her own door.

"I'm asking a great deal at your hands, Christian," said Isabel shortly. "The sacrifice of your good name maybe, because to be connected with those who are even suspected of evil doing is to share part of the odium which surrounds them. But I will promise

this much—that we will quit your roof before there is any public exposure. I will keep my eyes and my ears open, and nothing will escape me."

"Don't speak of it, Miss Isabel, don't say another word," cried Christian. "There is nothing I will not do for you. You will stop here as long as you like, and we will not speak of anything so terrible. I feel sure that this trouble will blow over yet."

As she uttered these words she took one of Isabel's hands between her own warm, kindly palms, with a pressure which spoke as eloquently as her honest eyes. The kindly sympathy was as a cup of cold water to a thirsty soul. Two large tears rose slowly in Isabel Farquhar's eyes and fell upon the kind hands clasping hers.

CHAPTER IX

MYRA FARQUHAR had never been in London, but she approached it free from any of the bounding ambition which fills the hearts of so many young, untried persons, who regard it as the goal and summit of all achievement. One object only brought her there—to find her father and mother, and if need be to share their obscurity. Until success should crown her quest it would be necessary for her to live, and to live she must work, because, in spite of her assurance to Lord Strathdee, Myra's means were limited indeed. She did not know how limited until she found how rich London is in the expenditure of money.

Having made all her plans, she communicated a part of them at least to her brother, and though he elected to disapprove highly of her course of action, he

appeared at the railway station at Glasgow to see her off.

"I think you're mad, Myra," he said in his light and airy tones, into which, however, he managed to convey a good deal of reproof. "Every one I have spoken to about it thinks so too."

"How dare you speak to any one about it?" asked Myra with a sudden flash. "I am astonished that you have not been ashamed to look people in the face, much less to speak of our unhappy family affairs."

"Oh, it was only Mrs. Maitland. I went out there, of course, expecting to see you, and she told me you had written to say you were not going back. You must excuse me saying that I think you were a fool, Myra, to throw up that good berth. You'll probably find out that people like Mrs. Maitland are not met with every day. She's a jolly nice woman."

"I quite agree with you there, Hamish, and you are no doubt wise to improve your opportunities," she said, with a faint scorn she could not altogether repress. The letters he had sent to Strathdee had been marked by nothing

but a selfish fear lest his prospects should be marred by what had happened, and even now he seemed to have but little else in his mind.

"You may sneer as much as you like, miss," he said calmly, "but I can tell you if you don't look after No. 1 in this world, no one else will. We have been confoundedly unfortunate in our people, you and I: we ought to condole with each other on that point."

"You may say what you like, Hamish, but I would not exchange my people, as you call them, for any one else in the whole wide world. You have never understood our mother."

"Oh no, I suppose not; that superior insight has been reserved for you. Of course, I know that she is a very clever woman, but according to all the tenets of common sense she is a trifle impossible, Myra. She lives at too high pressure, and tries to make everybody else do the same. The only way to succeed in life and to have a generally good time all round is to keep calm and never fuss about anything."

"I suppose so," said Myra. "Well, we need not prolong this unprofitable discussion."

"Oh, I know exactly what's passing in your mind," said Hamish; "but don't you think, now, that it was confoundedly rash, to say the least of it, on my mother's part, to fly off in this melodramatic manner when Lord Strathdee is on the high road to recovery, and probably there will be no more about it? If she had stopped quietly at Winans the whole affair would have blown over, and nobody would have been any the wiser."

"Lord Strathdee is not out of danger yet," said Myra pointedly. "I saw Dr. Macphail this morning before I left: he was called to the castle in the night, his patient had had a slight relapse into unconsciousness again."

"Oh, he'll have ups and downs, of course, like any other sick person," said Hamish lightly. "But he's sure to recover, and all this silly *fiasco* on my mother's part is nothing more than a publication to the world of the whole state of affairs."

Myra looked at him in silent wonder: evidently there was not an atom of compassion or

sympathy for his mother in his heart. At that moment Myra felt her affection weaned away from her brother never to come back. She bade him farewell without a single regret, and his last suggestion, that if she should think better of it she might write and ask Mrs. Maitland to take her back to Stonefield, provoked no response.

She also was busy through the long hours of the day, thinking and planning for the future opening up so strangely before her. To some characters an emergency means a new access of self-reliance, the birth of a strength of mind and will hitherto undreamed-of. Myra Farquhar entered the great city that night a lonely woman, without friends or resource, yet moved by an indomitable purpose which would allow nothing to set it aside.

She had the instincts and the fastidious tastes of a gentlewoman, besides being sufficiently worldly-wise to know that it was better for a solitary woman to take shelter in a first-class hotel, until at least she should have time to look about for a suitable and respectable lodging. She did not leave the station, but caused her modest luggage to be carried into

the adjoining hotel, and having dined simply, sat down quietly by the open window in her room to consider the question of ways and means. She was on the fifth floor, in a small room with a casement window looking out upon the Euston Road. Although it was only eight o'clock and the sun would not yet have set upon Strathdee, the early darkness was already falling over the city, and all the flashing lights made the traffic of the streets clearly discernible as at noon. It possessed for her, as it has possessed for many another, a strange and weird fascination. The confused roar and din seemed at length to melt into one continuous and harmonious volume of sound. The hurrying pedestrians, the laden omnibuses, the flying hansoms, passed in an endless stream before her wondering eyes, and seemed to create in her a rising excitement. Her heart throbbed with a strange feeling of exultation which lifted her, for the time being, clean above the somewhat desperate conditions of her life. Here, at least, was life, hot, restless enough, unending. Surely in this great throng there would be room for her. Had Myra Farquhar been a man she would have carved out

a path of distinction for herself. She had inherited all the strongest and best characteristics of both races, and was indeed a woman of extraordinary parts now about to be called into play for the first time.

One fact stood out clearly before her mind. It was imperative that she should find some occupation, and that speedily, since her means were of the smallest. The prospect did not appal her in the least, nay, it was full of a possibility which fascinated her. For the first time in her life she was dependent upon herself, and felt that she might now follow the bent of her own inclination, hitherto kept in check by the necessary conventionality of her surroundings.

Nothing could be done until the morrow, and after watching for some time the wonderful tide of life flowing in the streets, she felt a sense of weariness stealing over her. Of late she had passed restless nights haunted by the vague sense of impending trouble; she felt, however, almost happy to be relieved from all the old trammels. Realising that she would require all her strength for what was to come, she retired to bed early, and slept the whole

night through the dreamless slumber of utter weariness. When she awoke the sun was high in the heavens, a bright shaft of light lay across her bed and seemed to bid her a cheerful good-morning. She was astonished to find that it was ten o'clock. Half ashamed of having wasted the precious morning hours, she rose hastily and dressed. Having breakfasted well, she sallied forth into the streets to begin her search for occupation. She was but slenderly equipped, her only reference being a letter which Mrs. Maitland had very kindly written, wishing her well and expressing her willingness to give a reference if asked for it.

The directory she had studied in the coffee-room of the hotel had supplied her with some addresses of employment agencies, to which she directed her steps without delay. Her desire was to get some daily teaching which would enable her to have her evenings free in her own lodgings, so that she might have some chance of prosecuting the other search which was the main object of the step she had taken.

Her reception at the various offices at which she called was of the usual kind, not calcu-

lated to raise her expectations to fever-heat, or to depress her unduly. They simply took her name and list of qualifications, and promised to communicate with her as soon as they had anything likely to suit. Having paid the customary fee, she was at liberty to go until communicated with again. She was disappointed not to find at least one vacant appointment for which she might try, but was reassured when they explained to her that, it being near the end of the season, situations were less plentiful than they would be some weeks hence.

When she left the last office, which was situated in Oxford Street, having the whole day before her she felt no desire to return to the hotel, a dreary enough place for a solitary and friendless girl; she took an omnibus to the Marble Arch, and alighting there, strolled for an hour in the park, glad to have a short respite from the roar and bustle of the streets. But the day seemed long: the hours hang heavily on the hands of a person without occupation, especially if each hour is valuable from a pecuniary point of view.

Myra lingered for several days at the Euston

Hotel, economising as much as possible by taking most of her meals out of doors, anxious not to make a change until she should hear of something to do, when she could then seek lodging in the vicinity of her work. During these days she went through all the fluctuation of feeling common to a young person in her position. Without having exactly imagined London to be an Eldorado, she still had felt assured that in a place so vast there would certainly be something easily found for her to do. She was not ambitious: so far as her personal need was concerned, it was of the simplest; she only asked enough to live. She did not know how many thousands there were in the great city pursuing the same quest, nor how each day rose upon hopes destined only to be destroyed ere night fell. These dreary days full of the heart-sickness of hope deferred, and latterly haunted by a vague terror less she should be stranded friendless and penniless in the pitiless streets, were never afterwards effaced from Myra Farquhar's mind. At last one morning a letter came, enclosing the address of a lady at Brixton who desired a morning governess for her children. The

salary offered was small, so small that for the moment Myra felt inclined to throw the letter in the fire: on such a sum it would be impossible to keep body and soul together. But she thought better of it, and as the day was all before her she set out immediately after breakfast to interview her possible employer. During these days of enforced idleness Myra had improved the time by acquiring a good knowledge of London streets, and had mastered many details of cheap travelling which were unknown to some of the denizens of London themselves. She therefore reached her destination in Brixton—a dull, uninteresting suburban street, each house an exact replica of the other—without spending more than a few coppers. They were houses of fair dimensions, and when Myra was shown into the front sitting-room she was rather favourably impressed by its style and furnishing, which were really superior to the ordinary suburban house.

As she sat there waiting the advent of Mrs. Fane, an indescribable nervousness seized her. She had not eaten many substantial meals during the last fortnight, and was really suffer-

ing from the effects of unaccustomed privation. When the door was opened and the lady entered she rose hurriedly to her feet, struggling to keep her composure, which threatened to desert her.

CHAPTER X

"GOOD-MORNING," said Mrs. Fane in a pleasant, reassuring voice. "I am sorry to have kept you waiting, but I was not feeling well this morning and did not get up at my usual time. Being Saturday morning I allow myself a little licence."

Myra bowed and recovered herself sufficiently to regard the lady with interest. She was a person of tall and splendid figure, with something of a foreign look in her oval face with its large, languid dark eyes. She wore a very fantastic morning gown of startling hue, which, however, was not at all unbecoming to her.

"You are Miss Farquhar, I think. You are the tenth I have seen since yesterday morning."

"The tenth!" exclaimed Myra in dismay. "Then you are suited?"

"No, I have not seen any one to whom I would care to entrust my children," said Mrs. Fane. "Some of them were too young, and the most of them struck me as being incompetent. You are Scotch, I presume, judging from your rather difficult name."

"Yes, I am Scotch," answered Myra. "I have just come from Glasgow, where I have been for two years teaching three young children. I have no other reference."

"And why, may I ask, have you come to London?" inquired Mrs. Fane, looking keenly into the girl's face.

For a moment Myra felt confused, but presently rose to the occasion.

"I would rather you did not ask me any questions, madam," she answered quietly. "I had a private reason for wishing to come; it would not, however, interfere at all with the performance of my duty."

Mrs. Fane was struck with this speech as well as by the fine carriage and superior appearance of the girl before her. There were power, self-reliance, capability expressed in every feature of her face.

"You are candid," she answered, "and I

beg your pardon for having asked. Will you show me your reference, if you please?"

Myra took Mrs. Maitland's letter from her pocket and passed it to Mrs. Fane, who perused it in silence.

"It is very satisfactory," she said, "and I feel inclined to engage you at once. I am a person who acts on impulse as a rule, and unless I feel some magnetic attraction to people I never care to have anything to do with them. I think you and I could get on. Can you begin work soon?"

"Yes, madam, on Monday if you like. But there is one thing I would like to ask you."

"What is that?" asked Mrs. Fane at once.

"Whether you could not increase the salary. I have nothing else to depend upon, and fifteen shillings a week is not very much when one has to live in London."

"You cannot live on it, my dear," said Mrs. Fane promptly. "If you have nothing but that it is all up with you. I don't think I really can afford to pay any more; it is a very fair salary as daily governesses are paid, I suppose

you know that. But it is because I am a working woman myself that I will not grind the faces of any who work for me. I could perhaps find you some other pupils, or perhaps we might make another arrangement. What would you say to becoming a resident instead of a daily governess? in which case I should have to reduce the salary, say, to twenty-five pounds."

"For some reasons I should prefer to live out," said Myra, "but I don't see that I dare refuse your kind offer. I am quite friendless in London, and I have no one to look to. If I did not succeed in getting some other pupils, as you so kindly suggest, I could not live."

"Well, I must consult my husband," said Mrs. Fane. "I had better tell you a little about ourselves. My husband is a literary man: he has written some successful novels, but of late has fallen on evil days—no accounting for these things; he writes as well as, in my opinion ten times better than, he ever did, but his vogue is gone. I am a teacher of music myself; my father was a very well-known musician, and fortunately for us I have been

able to keep a remnant of his connection, otherwise we should have starved, my dear, positively starved."

There was something extraordinarily interesting and even fascinating about this woman as she stood there leaning against the piano, her face bearing a somewhat bitter look. She was distinguished by a strange beauty which impressed Myra very much. She was amazed at finding such a personality in so unlikely a place. She felt extraordinarily drawn to her, and almost passionately wished that the bargain should be struck at once, so that she might have a further opportunity of studying Mrs. Fane.

"Our own story, Miss Farquhar," continued Mrs. Fane, without seeming to notice the fascinated scrutiny of Myra's eyes, "would make a more interesting novel than my husband has ever written in his life. I have always told him so, but he says he will not make copy out of his own flesh and blood. Some day, if you should come to live with us, I may tell you the story. I hope you will come; I think I should like you—you are not an ordinary woman."

"What makes you think so?" asked Myra, immeasurably interested.

"Oh, well, your appearance for one thing, and there is a power of some sort in your face. I flatter myself that I am a bit of a physiognomist, and I feel sure that you could distinguish yourself somehow. Have you a literary bent?"

"If I have I am not aware of it—at least I have never cultivated it. I lay no claim to anything more than to be able to read intelligently and with some discrimination."

Mrs. Fane gave a significant nod.

"That is by no means so common a gift as one might imagine. I should like my husband to see you before we quite decide. He has gone to the British Museum this morning to do some reading. The children are out with one of the maids. I can't ask you to stay lunch to-day, because there would not be enough to go round, but if you will come back to tea about half-past four I shall then have talked over the matter with Mr. Fane, and perhaps we shall be able to come to a definite understanding."

"Thank you, I shall be sure to come."

"And in any case," said Mrs. Fane, "whether we decide that you become an inmate of our home or not, I shall give you the daily teaching and help you in every possible way. No, don't thank me; I know that you are worthy of help. You are not the first friendless soul who has found some comfort in this odd household, because, though we have suffered a great deal, we have never altogether lost heart, or allowed our sympathies to become narrow and centred in ourselves."

When Myra left the house after this strange interview, she had obtained sufficient food for thought during the intervening hours. She found herself passionately hoping that the result of the Fanes' family consultation would be that she would be admitted as a member of their household, and so strange a hold had it laid upon her heart that she felt almost sick with apprehension when she again presented herself at the door of the house in Angell Road. She was admitted by a child, a girl of about ten years of age, who greeted her almost as if she had been an old friend.

"You are to be our new governess, mother has told me. I begged that I might open the

door to you to tell you how glad I am. My name is Winifreth, then there is Dolly and Jack. Would you please to walk into the drawing-room ?"

There was no sort of shyness or awkwardness about this odd child; she had the self-possession of a woman. Myra followed her along the narrow hall and into a small, confined drawing-room, which, however, had the same singular and artistic charm which she had noticed in the other room. Mrs. Fane, more conventionally attired, bade her a pleasant good-afternoon, while a tall fair-haired man rose from a lounging chair and was introduced as Mr. Fane. Myra regarded him with the greatest possible interest. What his wife had said in the morning had awakened her curiosity, and she was not disappointed. His face, with the short pointed beard and dreamy blue eyes, was oddly familiar to her. She had no doubt in her own mind that she had seen it pictured in some illustrated journal, although she could not recall any public work bearing his name.

"Sit down, Miss Farquhar," he said in a soft musical voice. "My wife has just been telling

me that you are willing to undertake the care of our three young hopefuls—no sinecure, I assure you. They are incorrigibly lazy, except Winnie, perhaps, who is industrious in the very way that we do not desire. It is the aim of our lives to try and nip her literary ambition in the bud."

"Why?" asked Myra, much amused, and immediately feeling an indescribable homeliness and friendliness stealing over her. "You may be doing a serious injury to the British public by seeking to deprive it of a great gift."

Howard Fane shrugged his shoulders.

"It is possible, but not probable, and anyhow the British public doesn't deserve to have any more gifts showered upon it: it can't appreciate what it has got."

There was a distinct note of bitterness in his tone, which Myra, remembering his wife's words, had no difficulty in understanding.

"I am only a reader," she said, "but I have always thought that it was impossible to keep the literary bent in subjection, if it were decided enough."

"That is quite right, Miss Farquhar; but neither my daughter, nor any of my children,

will ever, with my consent, adopt the literary life as a career or means of livelihood. It is all very well as pastime, but when one has to exchange one's thoughts for bread and butter, it becomes a sordid and degrading occupation."

Myra saw Mrs. Fane's face cloud as she busied herself with the teacups. She waited a moment, and when no one spoke she ventured to reply.

"Is it more degrading than any other form of intellectual labour? It is what all the workers of the world have to do continually: since we cannot live without money we can only earn it by giving in exchange the gifts God has given to us."

"Yes, that is all very good so far as it goes," said Howard Fane, with the same bitter note in his voice. "But when it comes to prostitution of these gifts for mere sordid gain, it destroys the soul. It is because I have never been able to bring myself to it that you see us as we are."

"Suppose we change the subject, Howard," said Mrs. Fane cheerily. "You can't expect Miss Farquhar to be interested just yet, any-

how, in your pet grievance, and after all she came here to hear whether we were willing to give her anything in exchange for her gifts. Well, my dear, we have talked the matter over, and Mr. Fane agrees with me that, if you are willing, we might try the experiment of a resident governess. I daresay we shall get on very well, and I am sure you will help me as much as you can."

"Indeed I will," said Myra, with the utmost readiness. "I should like very much to come here, I feel so interested."

"It is very good of you to say so," said Mrs. Fane. "We are very odd people, every one will tell you that, but we try to do our duty according to our light. We shall not expect too much from you, and you will not expect too much from us, so we may possibly both arrive at contentment. How soon can you come?"

"I can come on Monday if it is convenient," answered Myra. "I am living at the Euston Hotel just now, and it is quite beyond my means; but I was afraid to make any change, at least until I heard of something to do."

"Very wise," said Mrs. Fane. "There is

only one thing more I should like to say, and that is we do not wish the children crammed or driven, you understand. We only want them taught intelligently and in moderation."

"I shall do everything I can to carry out your wishes," said Myra. "I feel so grateful at this moment to think that I have found a shelter that I could promise a great deal more than that."

"Oh, you had better observe moderation also," said Mrs. Fane with a laugh; but suddenly her gay humour passed and she laid her hand with a real kindliness on the girl's shoulder. "I have known what it is to be alone in London, my dear, and I have known many who have suffered through it. If we can do a little to help each other in this world, it is surely only the selfish and cruel who would hesitate to do it."

CHAPTER XI

THE household Myra Farquhar now entered presented a sharp and striking contrast to the one where she had been formerly employed in the same capacity. The one was conducted on strictly conventional lines, everything done decently and in order, and while the expenditure had been lavish, it was guided by a clever and capable head. In the Fane household each member was a law unto himself or herself. The Fanes were Bohemian in every relation of their lives, and troubled themselves not at all about the conventionalities. Many things, as was inevitable, shocked Myra; but the atmosphere of the house was so gracious and so kindly and so free, that she was happy in it from the first hour that she entered it.

Mrs. Fane left the house usually immediately after breakfast, having teaching appointments

until late in the afternoon. When her husband was not in his study he went to the British Museum, and, so far as Myra could judge, he appeared to work very hard indeed. He was a most lovable man, but Myra had not been many days in the house before she was able to discern that he lacked in some of the qualities which make for success. He was an artist and a dreamer, so filled with scorn for what he termed the degradation of the public taste in literature and art, that he would not take the smallest pains to write what would be likely to find a market. He had poetical gifts of the highest order, and the two books of poems which bore his name were well known in the limited circle which could appreciate them, but his novels were impossible judged from the standpoint of the circulating library. He wrote novels because it was necessary that he should contribute something to the domestic exchequer, but they were so fantastic and so entirely devoid of all the elements which go to make up the successful novel, that one after another publishers grew shy of them, and though his name had been before the public for years, he now found the greatest difficulty

in disposing of his wares. The same applied to the desultory writing which he contributed from time to time to the daily or weekly press. He had many friends in the journalistic world, men who would willingly have given him a helping hand had it been possible to reason with him, or to convince him that they had some little knowledge of their own business. Commission after commission he had executed so wide of the mark that they had been obliged to drop him, and he was now regarded as a crank, a man of undoubted genius, yet lacking in the mental balance which alone can guide great gifts and make them useful to mankind.

He had the gentlest nature. His consideration and loving-kindness in the house were a never-ending source of wonder to Myra, accustomed as she had been in her own short life to selfishness, unduly accentuated, in the men of her family. Part of his creed was that it was the duty of every man to make as many people as possible happy. Some have held the same creed, but have made the mistake of neglecting to carry it out in their own household. It was at home, however, that Howard Fane was

seen at his best, and he was adored by his wife and children and by all who came in contact with him. That he keenly felt the necessity which obliged his wife to earn money Myra knew from several remarks he had made to her. He chafed at his own inability to earn sufficient for all, and was, indeed, so inordinately sensitive on the point that his wife had to make very light of her own toil.

The first Sunday Myra spent in the household of the Fanes she was surprised to see after the early dinner some preparations being made in the drawing-room as if guests were expected.

"We are 'At Home' on Sunday afternoons," said Mrs. Fane pleasantly. "'At Home' to all sorts and conditions of men. Sometimes we have quite a crowd. I don't ask or expect you to assist at this function or even to be present at it unless you wish. It is right that you should have your Sundays free."

"I have nowhere to go," answered Myra, "and if you will allow me I should like very much to stay to-day at least."

"All right, my dear, you can if you like. A great many journalistic and artistic friends of

Mr. Fane's look us up on Sunday afternoons. I know, at least I have heard, that in Scotland a Sunday 'At Home' would be considered a dreadful innovation; but what can we do? we have to work so hard all the week that we have no time to think of our friends. They are equally busy, especially those employed on the staffs of newspapers. Sunday is their only breathing-space; do you blame them for seeking a little recreation?"

"Indeed I do not," answered Myra. "Circumstances always alter cases, don't they?"

"I shall be glad for you to see our friends to-day," said Mrs. Fane; "we expect some rather distinguished people. It will show you how very much my husband is respected by those whose opinion is worth having. I always tell him that I would much rather be in his position than be a popular novelist scooping in his thousands off every edition."

At these somewhat personal remarks, Fane, who was reading in the window-seat, put his head round the curtain.

"That is a very fine and creditable sentiment, Julie," he said with a broad smile, "but just think how you would enjoy the thousands.

I only wish for your sake, my dear, that I was a popular novelist."

"I prefer you as you are, Howard," she answered affectionately. "And we are very comfortable. Although we are not rich, we can even help others sometimes, and that is the greatest joy of all."

"You have helped me," said Myra with a sudden quick look of gratitude. "Just think what a friendless and miserable creature I might have been in this great city but for you."

"Ah, but there was an element of selfishness in that," said Mrs. Fane, "and my judgment did not play me false. I felt sure that in engaging you I was doing a good turn to myself and my children. Look how you help me in a hundred ways. I am so happy in my work, knowing that you are here to look after everything, and to keep Mr. Fane from being dull. It is not half the burden it used to be."

Now, though Myra had been very happy in the house of Mrs. Maitland at Stonefield, she had never felt that she was at all necessary to the comfort or well-being of the household.

It was a new sensation and a particularly satisfying one to feel that her services were so highly appreciated.

About four o'clock the guests began to drop in, chiefly men, who appeared to be on terms of intimacy in the house. Myra had begged that she might be left alone and not introduced to any one, she therefore seated herself at the tea-table, which was placed in the convenient shelter of a screen, whence she could observe and hear most of what was passing without attracting any attention herself. The conversation was purely on literary topics. These men appeared to have every new book at their finger-tips, and to gauge the measure of every literary reputation. Their criticism, though sometimes stringent, was not venomous. Myra's attention had seldom been more intensely engaged: she felt that until now she had no idea of the varied and engrossing interests of which life was full. By five o'clock the little *salon* was quite full, and Myra was interested beyond measure to hear announced certain names with which she had long been familiar in literature.

The last comer was a man who entered

unannounced, and stood behind the door for a few minutes before any one noticed him. He was evidently quite at home, however, because he did not appear embarrassed in the least. He had a striking and clever though somewhat sad face, and though he did not look more than thirty-five, Myra observed that the hair at his temples was tinged with grey. Presently Mrs. Fane observed him and greeted him with the utmost cordiality.

"Oh, how do you do, Mr. Blake? I did not see you come in. I thought you were in Tyrol this month."

"I have been, Mrs. Fane; I only returned last night. Don't you think I look as if I'd had a good holiday?"

"Well, yes, now I come to look at you I see that you have got a touch of sun-brown. Come and have a cup of tea. Miss Farquhar, may I present Mr. Blake to you, and leave you to take care of him? There's a discussion over in my corner that I want to hear to the bitter end."

So saying, with a nod and a smile she disappeared, and Myra was left to make the best of her new acquaintance.

"Miss Farquhar," he repeated as he stood just within the screen, looking down upon her with a grave interest of which she was quite conscious. "That is not an English name, and you have not an English face. I don't think I have had the pleasure of meeting you here before."

"No, you have not," answered Myra. "I am a Scotchwoman, and I am Mrs. Fane's new governess," she added, with perhaps the faintest touch of defiance in her voice. She was oddly influenced by some personal power in the man which she felt moved to resent. He compelled in her an interest which she had never yet felt in any member of the other sex.

"Are you resident in Mrs. Fane's household?" he asked, as he took the cup from her hand with a word of thanks.

"Yes, I have been here exactly six days."

"It is not long," he said with a smile, "but long enough, I daresay, to convince you that you will be very happy here. Our friends possess in a wonderful degree the gift of making their fellow creatures feel happy and at home."

As he uttered these words his glance fell upon Fane, who, under the influence of congenial society, was in one of his most brilliant moods. Myra saw that his glance was at once affectionate and admiring, and it was an instant passport to her confidence.

"You are quite right," she said with an absence of reserve which surprised herself. "I have never met people like them. I already feel as if I had been here for years. Of course you are aware that I come from a colder clime, where we make friends slowly, although I think I may say that when friendships are made they are worth the keeping."

"I have only been privileged to know one Scotchwoman, of humble origin, but I observed in her the very characteristic of which you speak. Have you only recently come from the North?"

"I have been in London only three weeks," answered Myra; and observing her closely, he saw a painful shadow gather in her eyes. There were few moments when the strange confusion and uncertainty of her life were absent from Myra's mind.

"Three weeks," he repeated. "It is not long. I was born in London, and I love the very stones of her streets: that, I suppose, seems incredible to you."

"Why should it?" asked Myra. "I have myself already felt its strange charm. I suppose it is the immensity, the volume of its myriad life, which appeals to one. I don't wonder that you who have been born here love it better than any place in the world."

CHAPTER XII

BLAKE regarded her attentively. He had never seen a face which interested him more. He discerned in her a reserve of power, a strong individuality, which made him desire some closer knowledge. The study of humanity was the business of his life; to find a new type in this unexpected corner was an unlooked-for piece of good fortune: so he might have expressed himself had he put his thoughts into words.

"In what part of Scotland is your home?" he asked. "I don't know much, but your name has a Highland sound."

"You are quite right. I belong to a very old Highland family—a family that, unfortunately for me and for others, has fallen on very evil days."

She lowered her voice as she uttered these words, half ashamed, indeed, of having

given even so little of her confidence unasked.

"The majority of families, both distinguished and obscure, have a record of evil days in their annals," he said sympathetically. "It is one of the inexorable laws of nature that none of us, either in our individual or collective capacity, shall enjoy the sunshine of prosperity for ever. I am sure I need not remind you that it is not desirable that we should: there are few things more fatal to mental or spiritual growth than unbroken success."

"I have not thought about it in that light," said Myra, lifting her clear beautiful eyes full of the liveliest intelligence to his face. "Perhaps because I have had so little of brightness or success in my life. It is not unnatural that I should sometimes wish for a taste of it."

"Not unnatural at all," he said quickly, "but you will certainly have your share. Perhaps even now it may be within reach. I trust that you are not cast friendless on this great city."

"I was quite friendless until I had the good fortune to meet with Mrs. Fane."

"I take it as an omen that the tide of your

fortune has turned, then," he said lightly. "I am sure that you will find my old friends Winnie and Dollie and Jack very promising pupils, Winnie especially. I know that her father and mother grieve over her unmistakable literary bent; why should they? If it is there, nothing will keep it in check. I suppose you have already heard our friend Fane on the woes of the literary life. He is specially eloquent on the degradation of the public taste."

There was not an atom of sarcasm or venom in this bantering speech. Myra laughed, and the unusual brightness of her look made her appear for the moment almost beautiful. She had the clear ruddy northern colour, and a freshness of look and manner which to Blake seemed altogether delightful. Suddenly she looked him full in the face, and asked him a straight question.

"Are you a literary man?"

"I have that honour," he answered, with a little bow. "For the last ten years I have been more or less before the reading public, though somewhat in disguise. I have found it convenient for many reasons to adhere strictly

to my *nom-de-plume.*" After a moment's hesitation he mentioned a name so well known in the world of letters that Myra was for the moment aghast, wondering how she had dared to speak so familiarly to a man for whose written words the world waited with respect.

"Now, if you look so aghast I shall regret my moment of unguarded confidence," he said, with a quizzical smile. "Perhaps you are one of those who regard literary men something like the denizens of the Zoo—best viewed from a respectable distance. If so, pray allow me to become plain Barron Blake again, at your service. I should be sorry if an acquaintance so pleasantly begun should suffer in any way."

"You must understand something at least of what I feel," said Myra, with a smile. "Your name is so well known that it rather took my breath away to find that I had been speaking so unconventionally to you. In the home where I was reared there were not many books, and though my mother was a great reader she had not much money to spend upon literature; but I think every book that you have written was upon her shelf."

"Indeed?" said Blake. "You speak in the past tense. I trust that you have not suffered the greatest of all losses."

"My mother is not dead, if you mean that," answered Myra, and something caught her breath so that the last word was almost a sob.

Blake was quick to observe her emotion, and to divine that there was something behind it.

"I regret if I have touched a painful chord," he said with the utmost gentleness. "With the best intentions sometimes we make serious blunders. I beg you to forgive me."

"There is no forgiveness needed," said Myra quickly. "It is a painful subject: one day if you will allow me I should like to tell you the story."

Blake betrayed no surprise, but gravely inclined his head and said it would give him pleasure to hear it. The sympathetic quality which made him such an attractive personality had won for him a great deal of unasked confidence, which could not have been more worthily placed. In an age of much that is sordid and self-seeking he had preserved the

highest ideals not only of life and work but of individual responsibility. The long and bitter apprenticeship he had served to his career had not embittered him, nor had success engendered in him that complacent selfishness which is observed in lesser natures everywhere. He still had an understanding sympathy with those who have not, to use the world's cant phrase, "got on." Failure from a worldly point of view did not in his estimation necessarily mean incompetency. He had an implicit faith in the gifts of Howard Fane, and still cherished the hope that they would receive recognition.

"I shall be very glad to hear anything you may have to tell me," he said in the grave kindly manner which at once reassured her. "Now that I have returned to town you will see me often here. I live a little way out of town in a small house on the edge of Bromley Common. Some necessary quiet I must have, so I have struck the happy mean. My friends reproach me for living in so unfashionable a neighbourhood, but I have proved its advantages to the full."

"You think, then, that you can work

better in the country?" said Myra with interest.

"I think that some quiet is necessary if work is to be sustained for any length of time," he repeated. "I am always telling my friend Fane that, but his mind is of a different order. Look at him now! He is in his element. If he could write half so brilliantly or interestingly as he can talk, he would have compelled the world to listen to him long ago. He is one whom an audience quickens with throbbing life. It has exactly the opposite effect on me."

"Have I not read somewhere only within the last few days that you are to undertake a lecturing tour in America, and to give readings from your own works?" said Myra inquiringly, marvelling more and more that she could speak to him so familiarly.

Blake gave a dry laugh.

"When I go on a lecturing tour in America all else will have failed," he said. "That it has been offered to me I will not deny; that I have ever entertained it for a moment, no."

He made a gesture which seemed to indicate

that the idea was one he would put away from him as far as possible.

"I may be wrong, but to me there is something repulsive in the idea of a man who has made a name in the world of letters turning showman on his own account. But there, let us not be too harsh. Do you know many here, Miss Farquhar? Some of the most interesting persons in this room are the failures, people of whom the world has not heard, perhaps because it is not worthy."

Myra was silent for a moment. The new and intoxicating sense of being talked to as a person whose opinion was of some value awakened in her the latent power which had never yet been touched.

"If you are right, then all we have been told about the correctness of the public judgment must be false. I have hitherto believed that all real worth received its recognition sooner or later."

The shrewdness of her speech struck Blake keenly. He had really permitted himself to utter carelessly some of the cant phrases common in the literary community of which he was a member. To have his words weighed

and challenged by this girl who claimed no intellectual superiority interested him beyond measure.

"You have me," he said with the utmost frankness. "And believe me you are right. There is an element wanting in our friend. The world is a fair and impartial judge. Its justice may be rough and in some cases tardy, but it may be trusted. You are a deeper thinker than I imagined, which shows, after all, how very superficial is any man's insight into the mind of another."

Myra blushed at this generous and unexpected acknowledgment. At that moment Mrs. Fane approached them with a smile.

"I see you have improved the time," she said brightly. "But it is too much monopoly. Miss Farquhar, will you sing something for us?"

Myra rose without a word of demur and went to the piano. She did not know that in that Bohemian gathering a song would not only be permissible but expected. Although she had spent her Sunday so strangely, it was still the Lord's Day to her, the day upon which certain things were not lawful nor expedient.

She sang well, with feeling and pathos, Spohr's setting of "As pants the hart." It had been a favourite with her mother. Many a Sunday evening the low roof of the old drawing-room at Winans had rung with its plaintive strains, and memory gave a certain passion to her rendering of both words and music which communicated itself to those who listened. A hush fell upon them, and from some eyes tears were not afar off. Her own eyes were strangely wet at the close, and with a hasty word of apology she rose from the piano and slipped from the room.

CHAPTER XIII

WHILE happy in her work and interested beyond measure in her new surroundings, Myra did not forget the primary object which had brought her to London. She soon became convinced, however, that so far as the finding of her father and mother was concerned, she might just as well have remained in Strathdee. London is so vast a place that she soon became convinced that any search she could prosecute on her own account was only a forlorn hope. From time to time she heard from the faithful Anne Gordon; but as the weeks flew by the news she received concerning Lord Strathdee was not reassuring. While reported out of danger it was quite evident that his recovery was tedious. That he had not himself replied to the letter she had written to acquaint him with her address, made her fear the consequences might yet be more serious than they

had at one time thought. At last, unable to bear the suspense, she wrote to Dr. Macphail, who replied promptly, telling her the truth, that Lord Strathdee was still in a very critical state, and that no man could tell what the end might be. He also mentioned that all proceedings against her father had been stayed, and that so far as Lord Strathdee was concerned he was at liberty to return to Winans at any time. He, however, plainly said that it would not be advisable for many considerations that he should return, feeling against him running so high in the Glen that it might neither be safe nor pleasant to return until there was better news of Lord Strathdee. From this letter Myra gathered that Dr. Macphail had no doubt in his mind that she was either with her parents or within reach of them, whereas she was as ignorant of their whereabouts as any dweller in Strathdee.

Sometimes she felt tempted to confide in Mrs. Fane, but they had many troubles and cares of their own, and as they betrayed no curiosity regarding her antecedents or history, she shrank from inflicting her troubles on them. She often remembered her impulsive

speech to Blake, sometimes with a faint regret, and at other times with a longing desire to see him again so that she might ask his advice.

He was absent from the next two Sunday gatherings at the Fanes' house, and on the third Sunday, instead of remaining indoors, Myra left the house before the guests began to arrive. While still happy and comfortable in her new home, she had been oppressed all day by an intolerable feeling of home-sickness, which rendered her unfit company for others and made her long to be alone. She felt that the singular and oppressive loneliness of the crowded streets would be more in keeping with her sombre thoughts than the gay chatter in Mrs. Fane's little *salon.*

She had just reached the end of the street, and was about to cross the Brixton Road to wait for an omnibus to take her right into town, when she saw Blake coming from the opposite direction. Her heart beat faster, and she felt almost inclined to turn back so that she might not miss the opportunity of a word with him, when he suddenly saw and recognised her. The pleasure on his face was

unmistakable as he reached her side and raised his hat.

"I am fortunate to have met you," he said. "I was just going on to Mrs. Fane's, where I should have been sorry to have missed you. May I ask if you are going far?"

"I don't know where I am going," she answered frankly. "I feel too much out of sorts to-day to meet Mrs. Fane's guests. She will be very happy to see you."

"I have not been able to come for two Sundays, as I had to go to Devonshire to see my mother, who has been very ill; I only returned last night. Won't you come back now?"

"I'd rather not," answered Myra, though her determination seemed to grow fainter each moment.

"You are home-sick, I think," he said gently. "Is that not so?"

"Yes, I suppose it is," answered Myra; and she could not hide the mist which suddenly dimmed her eyes. "It is very foolish, because I am among the kindest of friends; but there it is: one can't always control one's miserable feelings."

"Nor is it desirable that they should always be crushed down," said Blake quietly. "You said you did not know where you were going. Were you simply going to wander aimlessly whither the spirit might lead you?"

"That's about it," answered Myra. "I was really going to take the first omnibus into town."

"Well, it is a pleasant ride; will you allow me to come with you?"

Myra hesitated, and the colour flushed her cheek. She knew that, judged from the ordinary conventional standpoint, she ought not to accept such an escort, but the temptation was too great. She was so lonely, so much in need of sympathy and help! then she was influenced again by the strong magnetic attraction which the man seemed to exercise over her. He read her conflicting thoughts as easily as the page of an open book.

"I know what you are thinking," he said with a grave smile. "That it would not be quite the thing for you and me to have a little outing together. Our acquaintance certainly has been very brief, but I think you may trust me."

"Oh, I do trust you," she answered with the utmost readiness, "but there is Mrs. Fane to be considered."

"Mrs. Fane does not expect me to-day," he answered quickly, "and I can very soon explain matters to her when we meet. Here comes the omnibus: will you allow me?"

"Oh yes, since you are so kind," Myra answered confusedly; and the next minute she was being helped up the steep ladder to the top of the omnibus, where they seated themselves comfortably and were presently rolling on towards town. In a moment the whole aspect of things seemed to have changed for Myra Farquhar. The intense feeling of desolation which had almost overwhelmed her had disappeared, and in its place there was a sense of rest and comradeship which was the strangest as well as the sweetest experience she had ever known.

"You don't know much of London, I suppose? It is not possible, seeing you have been so short a time here, and your opportunities must necessarily have been few. Have you to return to Mrs. Fane's at any given time?"

"Oh no, I have the whole afternoon and evening at my disposal, but I have never gone out at all except to church in the evening."

"Well, will you allow me to take care of you this afternoon? This omnibus is going to Waterloo: suppose we take a train there to Hampton Court, and have a pull on the river?"

"On Sunday afternoon?" said Myra doubtfully.

"I understand your objection, but in this case I hardly think it holds good; we should not be employing any one; but just as you like. I would not for the world suggest anything which would vex or trouble you to look back upon, only it seems a shame to spend this glorious afternoon in town, and I can promise to bring you back in time for church if you wish."

"Mrs. Fane will wonder what has become of me," murmured Myra.

"Oh, but I shall tell her exactly what happened," said Blake. "Mrs. Fane knows me well enough. She may be surprised, but that will be all. Shall we go to Waterloo, then?"

"If you wish," answered Myra, marvelling

at the delicious sense of sweetness which stole into her heart.

"I told my mother about you," said Blake presently. "She was interested beyond measure. She once knew a dear old Scotch lady who lived part of every season in London. Possibly you may have heard of her : she had a place in Ross-shire—Lady Lundie."

"Lady Lundie!" exclaimed Myra in surprise. "She was my mother's aunt, and brought her up."

"Indeed?" said Blake, almost equally surprised. "You will remember I spoke when we met of a humble woman whom I knew, she was at one time maid to Lady Lundie, and is now married in Bromley."

"What is her name?" asked Myra.

"Christian Morison."

"Christian Morison!" cried Myra, "I have often heard my mother speak of her. Is she still alive?"

"Yes, so far as I know. I saw her some weeks ago : she has a shop not very far from where I live; sometimes I look in when I am out for a stroll. I always enjoy a talk with her."

"My mother used to have a town house next door to Lady Lundie's, but when we fell on evil days it had to be sold." Myra sat in silence for a few moments, thinking how small the world was, and how odd that they should have discovered this curious bond between them.

"I never saw Lady Lundie," she said presently. "My mother's marriage was such a blow to her that she never saw her afterwards, and she willed everything away from her, although she had been brought up as her own daughter."

"Yes, I have heard so," said Blake. "My mother has often spoken of Isabel Lundie as the most beautiful girl she had ever seen. That was your mother's name?"

"Yes, oh yes," said Myra, trembling with her emotion, "and she was beautiful. She is beautiful still, only trouble has changed her so much."

"She is still alive, I think you said?"

"Yes. May I tell you what has happened? It is a strange and dreadful story, but I think I could bear it better if you knew."

Inexpressibly touched by the trustful manner with which she spoke, Blake was for the

moment at a loss what to say. He was no less amazed at his own absorbing interest in the girl by his side, an interest which had advanced in leaps and bounds until he felt that what was of moment to her was almost of equal moment to him.

"You know I shall be glad to listen if you care to tell, but remember I asked no questions. It matters nothing to me what your story is; I am interested in you alone."

"But I wish to tell you," said Myra. "I wish to explain why I am here away from all my kindred, and I think somehow that you will be able to help me."

Then in a few words she told him the whole events of the past month. So graphically did she present the picture that it seemed to stand before Blake's mental vision finished in every detail. Even the few words in which she spoke of her brother presented a faithful portrait which struck Blake perhaps as much as anything she had said.

"And so you have really come to London to seek them?" he said; and there was the most infinite compassion in his voice and look. "A well-nigh impossible task."

"I see that now," she said mournfully. "I may live here for years and be no nearer than I am at this moment."

"Yet it is even possible that they might be living in the next street," he said. "Stranger things have happened, do happen, in this wonderful city. Well, Miss Farquhar, will you place this matter in my hands, leave me to act as I think wise?"

"Oh, I should like to," answered Myra impulsively, "but there are some things I must consider. My mother—it would be terrible to her to think that a stranger was seeking them; she would misunderstand it, I am sure."

"But she will never know," said Blake. "I can put machinery in motion which will work so smoothly and silently that she will be discovered and not know it. No one need know except you. What you wish to be assured of is that she is alive and in no immediate want. Is not that so?"

"Exactly," said Myra. "How quick you are to understand! I wish to be with her, to help her, if need be to work for her."

"Well, I can promise you that if she is in

this city I will discover her for you, if you will give me leave to work just as I like."

"Oh, certainly. Who am I to question your method of work? But why should you take this trouble for a stranger? I cannot understand it."

"The case interests me," he answered briefly, even a trifle coldly as Myra imagined, not knowing that he was putting a curb on himself.

"Do you not think that it might have been better if they had remained at Winans?" she asked, feeling now that she could speak freely of what was consuming her heart, that it was almost impossible to say enough. "What Hamish said was probably true: if they had stayed it might have blown over."

"That is quite possible; but I can readily understand the motive which prompted your poor mother—the idea of public shame was intolerable to her. Poor woman! she has suffered much."

"Oh yes, she has, more than you or any one knows," said Myra passionately. Although she had carefully abstained from any expressed blame of her father, Blake saw before him, as

if he had been etched, the portrait of the selfish, soured, and disappointed man, who, having allowed himself to become the slave of one morbid idea, had wrought not only his own undoing but the undoing of those bound to him by the closest of ties.

CHAPTER XIV

As was to be expected, Blake thought much of the story which Myra Farquhar had confided to him, and before putting any of the machinery of which he had spoken in motion, he took his walk across the Common next morning and bent his steps towards the shop of Christian Morison.

She was not unduly surprised to see him, because he often dropped in for a little chat, and especially made a point of calling upon her after he had been visiting his mother in Devonshire.

"I met some one yesterday whom you ought to be interested to hear about, Mrs. Morison," he said, after he had satisfied her many inquiries concerning his mother's welfare. "I don't suppose it would be possible for you to guess."

"I'm sure it wouldn't, sir," she answered innocently.

"But first let me ask you how long it is since you heard anything about the niece of old Lady Lundie, whom my mother remembers so well."

Mrs. Morison started, and had Blake been observing her closely he must have noticed the look of apprehension in her eyes.

"What a strange question!" she said. "What made you think of Miss Isabel all of a sudden?"

"Well, when I tell you that it was her daughter I met yesterday, you will not be surprised that I should have her in my mind."

"Her daughter!" repeated Mrs. Morison almost in dismay. "Do you mean Miss Myra Farquhar? Oh, it can't be possible."

"I do mean Miss Farquhar, and she is in London at present, teaching the children of a friend of mine."

"It can't be," said Christian, thrown off her guard for a moment, "it's quite impossible. Are you sure that you didn't make a mistake in the name?"

Blake smiled.

"My dear soul, I am quite sure, and she

told me the most extraordinary tale about her father and mother which I have half a mind to tell you, because, knowing your interest in the family, you might be able to help me."

"What was the tale?" asked Christian breathlessly, anxious for a moment's breathing space to consider what she should do.

"Well, it seems that she married rather a worthless person—at least, though Miss Farquhar did not say much about her father, it was easy to gather that her mother's life since her marriage has not been a particularly happy one. It seems he's had a feud for a great many years with a kinsman of his own, which terminated at last in an open and bitter quarrel. They came to blows, in fact. Lord Strathdee was seriously injured, and, to put it plainly, Mr. Farquhar has had to fly to get out of reach of the police."

"Will you just step into my room for a minute, Mr. Blake?" said Christian with perceptible excitement. "Now, this is the queerest thing that I have ever known to happen."

"What is?" asked Blake as he followed her

into the little back sitting-room, where he had often taken a friendly cup of tea at her hands.

"Why, that you should have got to know of this, and that you should have met Miss Myra," she said, leaning against the closed door with her arms folded, her comely face wearing a look of astonishment which almost amounted to consternation.

"You have heard something of the story too, then?" he said. "I suppose you have seen it in the newspapers. Miss Farquhar told me that various paragraphs had appeared in the London papers, but I must have missed them—at least I may have read them without recognising the names, certainly they made no impression on my mind."

"I have never seen anything about it in the newspapers," answered Christian, "but it is all true. Are you a friend of Miss Myra's, Mr. Blake?—I mean you wouldn't do her a bad turn."

"Certainly not," said Blake, with perhaps unnecessary fervour.

"Well, then, I must tell you; indeed I don't see how I can help it. They're here."

"What?" said Blake incredulously. "Do you mean that they are in this house?"

For answer Christian pointed upstairs.

"They've been here a month and more, ever since the thing happened. Miss Isabel came straight to me; I couldn't refuse to take her in, and I wouldn't if there had been fifty police after them."

"But as a matter of fact there never have been any," said Blake dryly. "Miss Farquhar told me yesterday that Lord Strathdee had stayed all proceedings, and that so far as he was concerned they were at liberty to return to their home."

"Has he recovered, then?" asked Christian eagerly. "If I could tell Mrs. Farquhar that I think it would make her a different woman."

"He has not recovered, but at least he may be said to be out of danger," replied Blake.

"And you saw Miss Myra, did you say? Do you know where she is, then?"

"Yes. Didn't I tell you she was in the house of a friend of mine?"

"And did she come to London because of what has happened?"

"Undoubtedly. She came to seek her mother, to whom she appears to be passionately attached."

Tears rose in Christian Morison's eyes.

"Not more so than her mother is to her," she said. "Now, that's the strangest thing I've ever heard of in my life. What is to be done, Mr. Blake? Do you think I should go up and tell Mrs. Farquhar that you're here?"

"I shouldn't advise it," said Blake. "I think the simplest course of action would be for me to see Miss Farquhar, and send her here."

"Why, of course it would," said Christian. "I might have thought of that. Can you see her soon? If you only knew how the poor lady's heart is hungering for her children. It was for their sakes she came away—she could not bear the thought of any disgrace touching them."

"I gathered as much from what Miss Farquhar said," was Blake's reply. "What kind of a fellow is this Farquhar who has wrought so much mischief?"

"Oh, I find no fault with him," said Christian, with a perplexed look. "He never says a

word in this house. What is to become of them, Mr. Blake? They can't live here; but I am quite certain that Mrs. Farquhar will never go back to Strathdee."

"Have they anything to live upon?" asked Blake, with an interest which surprised no one more than himself. "Have they any revenues from the estate?"

"No, it isn't an estate," answered Christian, "it's only a house. I don't think they have anything to live upon, and I see that my poor dear lady is fretting terribly. I have told her she needn't, because I have plenty, and so long as it lasts she is welcome to it."

"I quite understand that she feels it to be impossible to live on the bounty even of a generous heart like yours," said Blake. "It is a sad story and a strange one as well. I have seldom heard one that interested me more."

"Can you see Miss Myra, then, soon?"

"Yes, I can see her to-day," answered Blake readily. "She lives at Brixton. I shall go there after lunch."

Suddenly Christian put up her forefinger warningly.

"Hush! there they are coming downstairs. No, it is only one foot. She goes out day after day seeking something to do: it nearly breaks my heart. I've told her that she can't meet with anything but disappointment, because here in London nobody will give employment to those who have no references. Perhaps she will come in here. It will not matter: she will think that you have come to see me on business."

Christian opened the door between them, and looking out Blake saw a tall dark-robed figure standing in the little shop. At sight of him her pale face coloured quickly, and she turned away, and with a hasty word of apology to Mrs. Morison stepped out into the street, not, however, before Blake had obtained a full view of the beautiful face upon which sorrow had wrought such ravages. From where he stood he could watch her as she walked down the street, with a grace of carriage and distinguished appearance not often met with in that neighbourhood.

"Isn't she lovely?" asked Christian, with a sigh. "It's Lady Strathdee she ought to have been, and not a Mrs. Nobody hiding in my

poor home. I have never heard the outs and ins of that story, but I know that at one time Lord Strathdee and she were intended for each other. It was the one wish my lady wanted fulfilled before she died."

"Mrs. Farquhar has not told you, then, how it was she came to marry her present husband?"

Christian shook her head.

"No, only one day when I hinted at it, having such a sore heart to see her as she is, she begged me not to say any more about it, and I wouldn't for worlds. She's the sweetest and the dearest, and the cleverest too, that ever was born. I'll tell you what it is, Mr. Blake, her story is one of the mysteries that nobody can clear up but the God that allows them. It's true what the Bible says, that man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward."

"Some have more than their share, Mrs. Morison," observed Blake. "Well, I'd better go and tell Miss Farquhar her quest is ended. Perhaps it would be well to say nothing to them here until she arrives."

Blake reached the house in Angell Road to

find that Myra had taken the children for their afternoon walk. Mrs. Fane had just returned from the school where she gave music lessons and was naturally surprised to see Blake at such an hour.

"It seems an age since we saw you. Why didn't you come in last night when you were at the door?"

Blake smiled in response to her somewhat arch look.

"Well, Miss Farquhar would not allow me. Did she tell you what a pleasant outing we had?"

"Yes, she told me all about it. I was surprised. You must have found her interesting to take so much trouble on her behalf."

"Trouble is hardly the word in this instance, Mrs. Fane," said Blake; "she interests me very much."

"Take care that you don't interest her too much," said Mrs. Fane drily. "She is a very good girl for whom we all have the greatest affection. I will not have her made miserable, Barron."

"Don't look at me so fiercely," said Blake,

much amused. "Am I in the habit of making all the good girls of your acquaintance miserable?"

"Oh, it's all very well to chaff," she said, with a shrug of the shoulders. "I may tell you without making you unduly conceited, that most women find you charming. Remember that Miss Farquhar has had sufficient trouble in her life already, without having any addition to it."

"Has she told you any of the circumstances of her past life?"

"Yes, only last night after she came in. I suppose she had a feeling that it was hardly fair to keep me in the dark after she had given you such a full confidence."

"That simplifies my explanation very much," said Blake, with rather a satisfied look on his face. "A very odd thing has happened to-day which has convinced me that we move in very narrow circles, after all. By the merest accident I have discovered her father and mother."

Mrs. Fane looked profoundly surprised.

"Impossible! Why, I told Miss Farquhar

that it was almost hopeless to attempt such a search. How did it happen?"

"Very simply, after all. I happen to know a woman in my own neighbourhood who was maid to the old lady who brought up Mrs. Farquhar. She has a small shop and a very comfortable house at Bromley. Mrs. Farquhar remembered her, I suppose, and very wisely sought shelter from her, because it is certain that it is the last place in the world in which any one would be likely to seek them."

"Have you seen them, then?" asked Mrs. Fane. "It is quite a romance and will furnish you with no end of copy."

"I saw Mrs. Farquhar only as she passed out. She looks a very determined and high-minded person. It is an extraordinary story. As Lord Strathdee declines to take any proceedings whatever, I think the best thing they could do would be to go back to Scotland at once; there is no room in London for people like them, who have no occupation, and whose environment has totally unsuited them for the ordinary occupations of life."

"I hope this will not rob me of my governess," said Mrs. Fane. "You see, we

are all more or less selfish, most of us in the superlative degree."

"That's right," said Blake cheerfully. "Now, can you tell me which direction Miss Farquhar has taken this afternoon?"

CHAPTER XV

PERHAPS Hugh Farquhar was more to be pitied than any member of his family, since they owed their misfortune entirely to him. The enforced solitude and absolute lack of occupation necessitated by the present condition of his life had given him ample time for thought. It was impossible even for him not to feel his position acutely. They had now been more than a month in London, and he knew very well that it was impossible that the existing condition of things could go on. The question of means was, of course, the most pressing, for, though they had brought a sum of ready money with them, when that should be spent they would be at the end of their resources, and without a means of support.

Now, though they had never been in affluent circumstances, Hugh Farquhar had not until now been face to face with the problem of

mere existence. The small patrimony on the shores of Loch Winans, although meagre and insufficient, had at least given them an honourable shelter, and so long as he could handle a gun and a rod their table had never been empty. His wife never reproached him. The few words she spoke to him were invariably gentle and quiet. She had never again referred to the circumstances which had driven them into this strange exile. He did not know that there were times when she regretted the hasty step she had taken, especially as the weeks went by and the absence of any satisfactory tidings from Scotland made the uncertainty of their position intolerable. She also had faced the problem of existence, and knowing that something must be done soon, she had gone forth that very morning in answer to an advertisement for the matronship of a boy's school. That such a situation would involve separation from her husband she knew, but the thought did not greatly trouble her; he had ruined and destroyed her life, and she felt that she could leave him without a pang. Perhaps there was a feeling that, left to himself, he might somewhat retrieve his desperate position. Had

their trouble been one which they could have shared, cheering and encouraging one another, it would have been easy. As it was, they lived estranged, each unconscious of the slow fire consuming the heart of the other.

Farquhar seldom left the house. The nervous dread of pursuit and capture had left him, but long dwelling upon one idea had made him morbid, and he imagined himself an object of interest and suspicion to those who did not even bestow upon him a second glance or thought. He spent most of his time in the sitting-room, reading such books and newspapers as Mrs. Morison could supply from her little shop. Occasionally, after dusk, he would take a walk across the Common, and then he would move hurriedly and with the furtive air of a man ill at ease.

When his wife returned that afternoon about four o'clock he had scarcely turned a page since she left. As she opened the door she was struck for the first time by his exceeding paleness, also by the sharp outline of his face, and the whitening hair at the temples. He had the look of an old man, and a vague pity for him stirred in her heart, for he had lived

over fifty years of an ignoble life, in which he could scarcely have one happy or honourable memory.

"You ought to go out, Hugh; you stay too much in the house," she said quickly. "It is a beautiful afternoon; I will walk across the Common with you if you like."

He looked at her in surprise; it was the first time she had made such an offer.

"I don't want to go out to-day, Isabel. Where have you been, may I ask?"

"I have been in the City, calling at a secretary's office about a situation, which I am likely I think to get, though I can hardly believe in my good fortune."

"A situation—you?" he said, throwing up his head as if he had been stung. "What do you mean by talking of such a thing?"

"The explanation is very simple, Hugh," she said, without a touch of impatience. "We have not twenty pounds left; something must be done."

"You should have told me sooner," he said. "I can go out and work."

"You will have to, for yourself," she answered. "If I get this post, it means that I

must go into residence at a boys' home in Essex."

"Then you will leave me?" he said, with a curious inflection of his voice.

"I must," she answered. "There is no other way; and, after all, the life we are leading at present could not possibly go on."

"It would be better," he said, with a slight choking in his voice; "it would be far better to go back to Winans."

"I shall not go back to Winans," she answered, with a flash of the old fire. "I have suffered enough there; I can bear anything where I am unknown, but to go back to Winans and face all the humiliation again, I cannot do it, Hugh; you may go back if you like."

"And what about Hamish and Myra?" he asked dryly.

"I told you on that miserable day when we fled from Strathdee, that I had given them up," she said fiercely. "Pray don't mention them to me again."

"But you can't give them up, Isabel," he said, looking at her steadily. "They are your own children, and they have a claim upon

you. I have been thinking the whole matter out to-day, and my mind is made up. I am going back to Winans; they can do with me what they will."

"You can't!" she cried shrilly. "I forbid you to go. Do you think I have taken all this trouble for nothing? Lord Strathdee has not recovered. They are not even certain yet whether he will recover. Until that is settled nothing can be done. You must promise me that until then at least you will not even speak of going back to Winans. That much I can demand at your hands."

He sat silent, with his eyes down-dropped upon his book. He had been a poor husband to her, and he knew that she did not bear him much love. An overwhelming sense of his own littleness and impotence, a vague rebellion against the chain of circumstances which bound him hand and foot, brought a bitter, almost despairing look upon his face, but she was too much occupied with her own thoughts to see it. He had tried her much and often, and perhaps it was natural that she should at last show him but little consideration. Yet at that moment there was not a more forlorn or

despairing soul under heaven than that of Hugh Farquhar.

"It was a personal interview that did it," she said presently, reverting to the business which had taken her to the City that morning. "Although I could not offer any valuable references, or even a record of experience, I saw that the secretary was favourably disposed towards me. He said he would do his utmost to get me the post, and that he thought I would have a very good chance. If I should be successful, I would advise you to go abroad, Hugh."

He answered her not at all. The calm, even, matter-of-fact voice in which she uttered this proposal convinced him that it was a matter of the smallest moment to her. Well, it was but what he deserved. Yet at that moment the iron seemed to enter into Hugh Farquhar's soul. Absorbed in engrossing thought, neither took heed of a hurried foot ascending the stair, and when the door was suddenly thrown open they started in surprise. Then a strange low cry rang through the room, and Myra ran into her mother's arms.

"At last I have found you!" she sobbed

breathlessly. "Oh, mother, how dared you try to hide yourself away from me? You might have known it was impossible, that there was no place on earth where my love could not find you."

"My darling! my darling!"

Isabel Farquhar could say nothing but that as she clasped the dear girl close to her heart, her face most beautiful in its motherly devotion. Hugh Farquhar rose unsteadily to his feet. His heart was not less full of passionate love for his child—perhaps in the parental relation he had failed least of all—yet he dared not wait to hear what she should say to him. He expected nothing but bitter words at her hands, since to him they owed all the terrible trouble which had wrought such havoc in their lives. By some swift intuition Myra became aware of his attitude, and divined something of what was passing in his heart. It cast a shadow over the perfect joy in that moment of reunion. She drew herself back and spoke falteringly:

"My father, too; oh, how he has changed! You have both suffered enough—too much. Oh, what is to be the end of it all?"

"The end seems to matter nothing to me now, my daughter, since I have you here," said Isabel Farquhar tremblingly. "But tell me how and whence you have come, and what is the news you bring."

"I have been in London some weeks, mother, seeking you all the time, at least when I was not occupied with my other duties."

"Have you then left Mrs. Maitland's?"

"Yes. I went to Winans directly I heard—" she said, with a hesitating glance at her father. "I brought a message from Lord Strathdee; I saw him before I came."

Isabel Farquhar paled. Her husband winced as he waited to hear what it might be.

"He said I was to tell you that, so far as he is concerned, you could go back to Winans any day; that he bears no malice."

"But that is three weeks ago. Anything may have happened in the interval," said Mrs. Farquhar feverishly.

"Nothing has happened," answered Myra quickly. "I had a letter from Doctor Macphail only to-day. He tells me that Lord Strathdee may now be considered completely out of danger."

Hugh Farquhar drew a long breath, and his face looked less wan and worn. His wife turned to him with one of her swift imperious glances.

"Do you hear, Hugh? Strathdee will recover, and he has forgiven surely unto seventy times seven. You can go back to Winans in safety, if you wish; I cannot."

"I hear you, Isabel," he answered dully, and turning about without another word he slowly left the room.

CHAPTER XVI

A VAGUE dread seemed to fill Myra's heart as she heard his retreating foot.

"My heart aches for him, mother; he has suffered terribly. It was done in a moment of passion; we must not be too hard on him."

"Hard on him!" Her mother's fine nostrils dilated as she repeated the words. "Will you believe that I have never uttered a word of reproach to him since I left Winans?"

"Perhaps not, but looks can kill. I should not like you to look at me as you did at him just now. Poor father! he is to be pitied."

"Listen to me, Myra. I would not willingly be unjust or harsh to any one. You do not know all I have suffered—all I have been deprived of. Once Lord Strathdee and I were engaged, and I loved him as my own soul. Hugh Farquhar also wished to marry me—he

loved me after a fashion of his own. He poisoned my mind against Strathdee; I cannot tell you the whole story now, but it was a tissue of lies, which I believed, God forgive me, against the noblest gentleman that ever drew the breath of life. And he won me by his subtle arts to marry him; then when he found that my heart was not and never had been his, he told me how I had been fooled. He expected a fortune with me too, but, as you know, my Aunt Margaret never forgave me my treatment of Strathdee, and left me nothing. With such bitterness between us our married life has been nothing but a mockery of the name. You and Hamish have been my only sunshine. He has cherished a causeless hatred against Strathdee all these years—the hatred a man bears to one he has wronged. It is the bitterest of all."

"It is terrible," said Myra with a sigh. "But my heart aches for him, in spite of all."

"You are his child; I suppose there is something in that tie," observed Isabel Farquhar. "But come, tell me how you have come here; where did you get the clue to this place?"

"It came about quite simply," Myra answered.

And a faint flush rose to her cheek as she related the circumstances.

"You made very free with a stranger, Myra; but since the end is so happy, I must not say a word. But now, what better are we? You have only complicated affairs. I am in hopes of getting a situation, for which I applied this morning, and which will take me away from London."

"You—a situation!" repeated Myra with wonder in her voice. "You look like a princess or a queen, to command, instead of to receive orders, mother. You will never do as you are bid."

A smile, the first for many weeks, crossed her mother's face.

"I can learn that, as I have had to learn much else, Myra."

"Out of London did you say? Then what of my father? Will he accompany you?"

"No; he must fend for himself, as we say in the North."

"Then you will leave him?"

"I must; I have to earn my bread. He must earn his, unless he goes back cravenly to Winans."

A strange conflict raged in the girl's soul. She knew what her mother's hard life had been. She needed none to point out how completely she was justified in her present decision, and yet a deep compassion moved her heart towards the broken and miserable man, who was a very Ishmaelite whom all scorned and blamed.

"Mother, I cannot bear it; let us all go back to Winans."

"To face the altered looks, the humiliating scorn? Never, while I live! I expected some things more terrible when I fled, but even that which exists I cannot bear. I shall never go back to Winans, Myra, and your father knows it."

"Then let us make a home together here," she pleaded. "We must not leave him; at least, I cannot. He has always been kind to me, mother. If you go to this situation, I shall stay here and take care of him."

"You will have your hands full," she made answer dryly, but she was somewhat taken aback. It is the unexpected that always happens, and Myra seemed to find some satisfaction in presenting the other side of the

picture. It was a side which had not often been uppermost in Isabel Farquhar's mind. For the first time it was suggested that she might have failed somewhat in her wifely duty, that for this terrible shipwreck perhaps she was not altogether blameless. It was not a pleasant thought. She put it from her impatiently.

"There need be no hurry to decide anything," she said rather quickly. "It will be three weeks at least before I hear the result of my application this morning. We can remain here till then at least. I suppose we can see you often?"

"Yes, Mrs. Fane is very good; I have told her everything."

"It seems to me you have told a good many people everything," observed her mother dryly. "I should like to see this son of Mrs. Blake. I never remember to have seen him in the old Lowndes Square days."

"He was at Oxford then, I believe, and his mother always left town in June," said Myra ingenuously.

"I am glad your new friend is a gentleman, Myra. In a Bohemian household such as

Mrs. Fane's you might easily have made an undesirable acquaintance."

Myra rose somewhat disappointedly. It seemed to her that her mother had become sad, embittered, worldly-wise, that she was less noble and less lovable than when last they met.

"You saw Hamish, I suppose, before you left. What does he say of it all?"

"Hamish has cast us off, mother," answered Myra. "He says they are best off who have no people."

She spoke with some bitterness. Her mother only sighed.

"It is the philosophy of a young man who has his way to make in the world, my dear. We must not be too hard on him."

"I am not hard on him, only I do not understand him," said Myra. And her tone had a more despondent ring in it than ever. "Well, I must be going, dear mother. Promise me you will do nothing, take no final step, I mean, unknown to me."

"I can promise that, my child, when you have done so much for me," she answered, and they kissed each other with all the old

affection. Yet Myra vaguely felt that something had come between them. She had thought that, when she found her mother again, nothing else would greatly matter. So is it with much we prize in anticipation here. It is the wise man who lays his heart's best treasure in heaven. It was more of her father than her mother Myra thought as she took her way down the quiet street. His forlorn condition appealed to her pity; she wished she could be of some help to him. She only partly understood her mother's attitude towards him, and while acknowledging that she had ample justification for it, she could have wished her less severe. As she stepped out into the wide thoroughfare she saw him crossing the road in the direction of the open Common. Though it was now time for her to go back, she felt she must speak to him, if only to utter a word of comfort and sympathy. Her fleet young feet swiftly overtook him, and at the sound of her voice he started in surprise.

"I am glad I have met you here, father," she said, slipping her hand through his arm. "Why did you leave us so abruptly?"

"I thought you wished it," he answered,

"You look well, child; you bid fair to outrival your mother, and that is saying a good deal."

Myra flushed, not ill-pleased. She was singularly free of personal vanity, but since she had met Barron Blake she had grown critical of her own appearance.

"I was only saying to mother that I thought you looked so changed," she said quite gently. "Perhaps, after all this unhappy affair blows over, you will be better."

"It will never blow over for me, Myra. Your mother will never forgive me. She has told me so."

"But perhaps she will yet change; we will hope so. Lord Strathdee spoke so kindly of you, father, and if he will forget, what need we care for the rest of the world?"

"What is he made of?" asked Hugh Farquhar almost fiercely. "I have given him the greatest provocation one man can give to another. I charged him with weaning your mother's heart away from me."

"You said that to Lord Strathdee, father, knowing what he is?" said Myra in painful surprise.

"I did; and then I saw him angered for the first time. I did not fell him like a common assassin, Myra. It was a fair fight, in which he might have had the best of it, for he is a stronger man than I. I did not want to sneak away. I was ready to face the consequences, but your mother was too strong for me. I shall go back to Winans, Myra. She will leave me, she says, so it cannot matter where I go."

Myra was silent, sorely perplexed, torn between two conflicting desires. Never had she felt more drawn to her father as she saw in him the awakening of the better nature which had been asleep so long. Certain words of Holy Writ recurred to her mind, words she had heard many a day in the old church of Strathdee: "The smoking flax He shall not quench, nor break the bruised reed."

"I hope that we shall all go back to Winans yet, father. Will you leave it to me? I will try to persuade mother. She will not always remain in this bitter mood."

Farquhar turned to his daughter with a sudden and unusual softness in his eye. As a child he had loved her passionately, but as she

grew older she had ceased to interest him. He had seen, of course, that she sided always with her mother, and he had, rightly or wrongly, imagined them to be hostile to him. A morbid jealousy had tinged and soured even the sweetest relations of life.

"What makes you so kind?" he asked almost harshly. "According to your mother, I have blasted your whole life. You ought to hate me."

"Oh, mother does not always mean what she says," said Myra airily, though she was really touched by his words. "Father, did you ever hear of Barron Blake the novelist?" she asked with some suddenness.

"Yes, there were some of his books at Winans. But what has he to do with the case?"

"Oh, nothing, only I have met him several times at Mrs. Fane's. You would like him, I think. He is so clever and he understands everything. It was he who found you for me!"

"You told him! Surely that was most imprudent?"

"You would not think so if you knew the

man," said Myra. "I have a project in my head. I think he could help you. Will you let him come and see you, father?"

"I have no desire to meet strangers, but if he is a friend of yours, child, and understands my position, I shall be glad to see him," answered Farquhar. And he spoke more naturally and pleasantly than Myra had heard him speak since they had met.

"Well, I will tell him. Now I must go, or I shall be too late. Good-bye, father; London seems less desolate to-day since I have found you."

"And to me too, child, to me too," he said brokenly. And with a hurried hand-clasp he went on his way, not once looking back. The first ray of light had fallen across his solitary way, and he wanted time and solitude to ponder upon it and to shape the future, which would no longer be set aside.

CHAPTER XVII

BARRON BLAKE had lived a nomadic life, and in some respects a very solitary one. He had many acquaintances, but few friends; the only house in London where he could be said to be on intimate terms was the unpretentious abode of the Fanes. He had achieved a very great success, though he was in no sense of the word a popular writer, and had managed quite unconsciously to surround himself with a little halo of mystery which made him doubly interesting. He had never been interviewed, and it was impossible to write personal paragraphs about an individual so elusive that no one could give him a habitation. The rooms he occupied in the unfashionable neighbourhood of Bromley Common were in an ordinary middle-class house kept by a widow, who took no concern with him beyond the fact that he gave no trouble and paid his rent regularly.

As he seemed to have no fixed occupation, she took him to be a gentleman of means, though she sometimes spoke of his studious habits and the lateness of the hours he kept in his study. Blake did not care much for literary society, but the few who knew him intimately loved him well, for indeed he was a singularly lovable man. In his time he had met most of the women who were well known in society and the world of letters, and he had been flattered by not a few, but though he had admired many his heart had never been touched, and he often said to his old friend Fane that he would never marry.

His meeting with Myra Farquhar, however, gave a different cast to his thoughts. For the first time he thought with envy of those who had homes of their own. The girl had interested him by her frank, unconscious, perfect naturalness. He was accustomed to women who posed a good deal and who never forgot for a moment the effect produced. Then her devotion to her parents, her high clear sense of duty, her practical way of looking at things, all came upon him with a delightful sense of refreshment. He had no sisters, and was an

only son. His mother was a very old lady, and she many times wished he would marry. She lived on the family property in Devonshire, and never now came to London, though her son spent a good part of each year away from her. While he believed that the quiet of the country was necessary to the production of any good or valuable work, he also felt that it was not well to be too far from the heart of things.

For the second time that day he presented himself at the house in Angell Road after dinner. Mrs. Fane was not much surprised to see him, and though he did not ask for Miss Farquhar, she was considerate enough to see that they had speech alone. Blake thought that Myra looked pale and tired when she entered the little drawing-room. The strain of the day had indeed been somewhat hard upon her, and now she was undoubtedly feeling the reaction.

"It was all right," he said eagerly; "you found them well, I trust. I need not ask if they were glad to see you."

"Oh yes, they were. How can I thank you for all the interest you have taken in this matter?"

"I don't want any thanks," answered Blake curtly. "As I said to Mrs. Fane this afternoon, the case interested me, and it was very little I did after all."

"It was a good deal, I think," said Myra. "You gave me your sympathy, and when we are in trouble that is a good deal."

"I quite agree with you there," said Blake. "May I ask then, without seeming impertinent, how you found them, and what are their prospects or intentions for the future?"

"I am in great trouble about them, Mr. Blake," said Myra frankly, "about my mother especially; she has evidently quite made up her mind to leave my father. Do you think that can be right?"

Blake looked a trifle uncomfortable at this direct question.

"I should not like to pass an opinion, Miss Farquhar. Not only have I never been married myself, but I have always refrained from meddling in other people's matrimonial affairs, although I have often been asked for advice. I can see that your sympathies are not now so exclusively on your mother's side."

"No, they are not. I have been somewhat disappointed to-day," said Myra, and her bosom heaved with an emotion she had difficulty in controlling. "To-day I have thought for the first time that she has been too hard on him. She talks of taking a situation even, and letting him go where he wills. Do you think that would be right?"

"The simplest solution of the whole affair would be for them to return to Scotland," said Blake, purposely evading her question.

"I think so, but my mother will not listen to such a suggestion for a moment. If only she will not leave him, we might make a little home here; but I have proved how difficult it is for the friendless and lonely to find work in London."

"It is certainly difficult," Blake admitted, "but if your father finally decided to remain here I daresay I could find him something to do. It is usually a matter of influence, and I have some in certain quarters. Do you think he would see me if I were to call?"

"I am sure he would," said Myra eagerly. "I took the liberty of suggesting that he should see and speak with you; I feel that you would understand everything so much better if you could only see them both."

"I feel honoured by your confidence," said Blake quickly, "and I assure you you will not find it misplaced."

"Oh, I know that," cried Myra warmly. "I feel that I can never thank you enough; for one in your position to do so much for those who are friendless and of no account, only proves your greatness of heart."

"Come, come, that is too much," said Blake with good-humoured impatience. "Well, I shall take the earliest opportunity of calling on my old friend Mrs. Morison. You see it is not like going to a strange house. I shall not have to present my credentials — to her at least."

Myra smiled, and her heart, as she bade him good-bye, was lighter than it had been for many a day. He possessed in a very high degree that indescribable personal quality which seemed to give heart and courage to all influenced by it. He did a great deal to help

others in a quiet unostentatious way. In many homes the name of Barron Blake was gratefully cherished.

Next morning, as he took his walk on the Common, he observed the solitary figure of a man sitting in a somewhat dejected attitude on one of the seats. Some intuition told him it was Hugh Farquhar. He often entered into conversation with solitary stragglers on the Common, and had a singular way of ingratiating himself into the favour of strangers. When he sat down at the other end of the seat, however, and before he had time to make a remark, Farquhar rose hurriedly, as if afraid of being accosted, and was about to move off when Blake spoke.

"I believe that I am speaking to Mr. Hugh Farquhar," he said at random, thinking that if he had made a mistake no great harm would be done.

"My name is Farquhar," was the reply, delivered in rather a defiant tone. "How do you happen to know me?"

"My name is Blake," said Blake at once, in order to disarm his suspicion. "I think that your daughter, with whom I have the honour

of a slight acquaintance, has mentioned it to you."

"Yes, she has," said Farquhar, his expression rapidly changing as he resumed the seat he had quickly vacated. "I appreciate the kind interest you have taken in my daughter, sir, although I am unfortunately not in a position to acknowledge it adequately."

"I have done nothing," said Blake quietly, at the same time taking the keenest mental notes of the man before him, struck by his gentlemanly appearance and his fine address. "Your daughter has been good enough to tell me something of your history and affairs, Mr. Farquhar," said Blake, "and I intended to call upon you this very day to inquire whether I could be of any use to you. If you decide to remain in London it is possible that I might be able to serve you, because, as I explained to Miss Farquhar, I have some slight influence in certain quarters which it would give me very great pleasure to use on your behalf."

"You are very kind, sir," said Farquhar, "but my present intention is to return to Scotland without undue delay. I only wait

until I see what course of action my wife is likely to pursue."

"She may be persuaded to return also," said Blake hopefully. "Your daughter has told me that she contemplates taking some situation. She does not know what she is talking of; a woman nurtured as she has been would not be likely to be happy in any menial position, even if she were qualified to take it, which I doubt. I quite understand the feeling which makes her hesitate to return, but time will make it easier. I trust, for your sake, she will not persist in her present decision."

"She has cause to hate me, I know," said Farquhar gloomily. "I have not treated her well. I stole her away from another man, the only man she ever cared about. When I have told you that, you will readily understand that, though I have sinned, my punishment all these years has not been lacking. Only this morning I thought that the best atonement I could make would be to end my miserable life, which has never been anything but a curse to myself and to all connected with me."

"Now that is a coward's speech," said Blake,

"and you must banish such a thought from your mind at once and for ever. It is possible to atone in a nobler fashion. I have never met your wife, but your daughter at least would grieve to hear you speak like that."

"Myra is a good girl," said Farquhar, and his eye softened. "I should like to see the man I have wronged again, if only to tell him that I am glad, for no purely selfish reasons, that he has recovered."

"Were I in your place," said Blake quietly, "I should do that without delay."

Farquhar regarded him eagerly.

"If you think so," he said quickly, "then I shall go without any further delay."

And that night, unheeding of his wife's remonstrances, Hugh Farquhar returned to Scotland.

CHAPTER XVIII

"Now that you are so much better, Ian," said Graham Leslie to her cousin, "I think I had better be getting back to my own house of Moriarty."

They were together in the large and pleasant room adjoining the sick-room where Lord Strathdee had spent so many weary weeks.

"Why should you hasten away, Graham?" asked Strathdee. "No one needs you at Moriarty. I need you very much here."

These appreciative words called up a gratified look on Graham Leslie's face, but she shook her head.

"It is very kind of you to say that, Ian, and it has made me happy to be of use to you, but all the same I think that I would like to go back to my own house."

Strathdee regarded her attentively. She had now been in close attendance upon him

for six weeks, taking her full share of nursing with the professional nurses, who had now left the Castle. During these weeks she had surprised him by her gentle womanly ways. He had all his life long regarded his cousin Graham as rather a hard woman, lacking in the softer attributes of her sex. He was now filled with gratitude to her, a gratitude not unmixed with regret that he had misjudged her.

"I wish you would stay a week or two longer, Graham. I was speaking to Macphail yesterday, asking him—what do you think?"

"I am sure I couldn't say, Ian," she answered, "but I should not be surprised if it was something quixotic and rather impossible."

"Well, perhaps so. I wanted to know when he would give me leave to go to London."

"To London!" exclaimed his cousin in almost horror-stricken tones. "I hope he gave you the answer you deserve."

"Of course he said I could not go for some weeks—that I expected; but the moment I get his permission I am off, Graham."

"To seek out the Farquhars, I suppose," she said with some bitterness. "Really, Ian, you

must excuse me saying that I think you carry your quixotic goodness too far."

"Well, it is only my concern, Graham," he said good-humouredly, "and it is a certainty that nobody will be able to persuade them to come back to Winans except me."

"I don't see what you want them back here at all for," she said snappishly. "A man who tried to murder you—for however much you may seek to gloss it over, Ian, that's practically what it amounts to—such a man deserves little consideration at your hands. Of course you know that in my opinion he has had too much already. Hugh Farquhar will be a wise man if he never shows his face in Strathdee again."

"But think of Isabel and Myra, Graham: they have never wronged me, and yet the innocent have to suffer for the guilty. I must forget it all for their sakes; besides, I am sorry for Hugh. He made a false step at the beginning and he has suffered from it all his life. I don't think, speaking quite frankly between ourselves, that Isabel has made it any easier for him."

Graham Leslie could scarcely believe her

ears. This was the first time he had ever spoken frankly to her regarding Isabel Farquhar, and to hear him blame her even so slightly caused her the greatest surprise.

"I don't know what you expect from a woman, Ian," she said rather quickly. "I am not very fond of Isabel Farquhar, as you know, but I will say that I think she has made an excellent wife to a good-for-nothing husband, much better than he deserved. But if you will have them back to Winans, why not write and tell them so?"

"I have written, but have had no reply. There has not been time yet, for of course they must consider it."

At that moment there was a knock at the door and Diarmid entered the room. Graham was struck by the expression of his face even before he spoke.

"There is somebody below asking to see you, my lord," he said. "I hardly know whether I ought to bring up the message."

Strathdee looked at his faithful servant with a good-humoured smile.

"Out with it, Diarmid. I am not so easily surprised as you seem to think."

"Well, sir, it's Mr. Hugh Farquhar from Winans."

Graham Leslie sprang to her feet and her face flushed hotly.

"How dared he! How dared he!" she cried, clenching her hands, "to come here after all that has happened? Surely you will return to him the answer he deserves, Ian?"

A strange look was on the face of Lord Strathdee.

"It is natural that you should speak so, perhaps, Graham, but I feel differently. Tell Mr. Farquhar that I will see him at once."

At this his cousin intervened.

"It is no use my saying that you ought not to see him, Ian; but apart from the excitement such an interview cannot fail to cause, it may not be safe. After what has happened, nothing base or cowardly done by Hugh Farquhar would at all surprise me. I shall at least remain in the room, and Diarmid must be within call."

Strathdee smiled, and there was some tenderness in the look he cast upon his cousin's face, but she was too much excited to observe it.

"You are needlessly anxious, Graham," he said gently. "Hugh Farquhar is not likely to come here except on a peaceable errand. God knows I am glad enough to hear that he has come: no possible harm can come of it. Tell him to come up, Diarmid."

Graham Leslie, still trembling violently with the excitement of the moment, turned to her cousin, too much concerned to seek to hide her anxiety.

"Ian, I cannot leave you with that man, I am afraid."

"You need not be, Graham," he said reassuringly. "Believe me, I know what I am about: certain intuitions we have can be depended on; I am certain that nothing but good will come out of this interview. Perhaps, please God, it may be the end of this bitter feud and the beginning of a new life for us all."

Tears rose unbidden to the proud eyes which seldom showed such signs of weakness.

"At least you will let me remain in the adjoining room. I shall hear nothing, and indeed I have no wish to hear it."

"As you will, Graham; but if I ask you to come in you will know why I wish it, and you

will promise me to speak a kind word to Hugh Farquhar for my sake. I would wish you to behave as if nothing had happened."

"You ask from me what is well-nigh impossible, Ian. But yes," she added hastily, as she heard the sound of approaching feet, "I will do it for your sake."

Strathdee, although so far convalescent that he could sit up in his easy chair, was not yet able to walk without assistance. His face grew a shade paler as the door opened, and he sat forward eagerly, trying to control the natural nervousness which moved him.

"Mr. Hugh Farquhar," said Diarmid's gruff tones, and immediately the door was closed, although Diarmid took care to remain in the corridor, feeling with Miss Leslie that under the circumstances it was as well to be within call.

Hugh Farquhar advanced into the room, and stood for a moment with his arms folded across his chest, regarding the cousin he had wronged, and against whom he had cherished so long a causeless hate. It was a strange moment, the painful strain of which was keenly felt by both. Strathdee was the first

to break it. He extended his hand with a somewhat wavering smile, which, however, was frank and cordial as it had been in the days when they had been boys together, before the passions of manhood had made the bitterness of death between them.

"You will offer me your hand, Ian?" said Hugh Farquhar, though he stood immovable and made no sign of taking it. "Tell me what you are made of? You cannot be as other men with their passions and revengeful feelings. I have come back to tell you that I regret what I did, and if you wish to punish me I am ready: it matters nothing to me what becomes of me now."

"I wish you would come nearer to me, Hugh: bring a chair and sit down close to me, where I can see your face and speak to you without effort. You see that I am not able as yet for any exertion."

Hugh Farquhar winced.

"I cannot sit down in your presence until you tell me you have forgiven me," he said steadily, steeling himself to utter the words, which did not come naturally to him, as Strathdee well knew.

"If I had not forgiven you long ago, Hugh, I should not be speaking to you face to face now," he said quickly. "But if it will make you any happier I can say with all truth that I forgive you. The provocation was not all on one side; I was to blame too. Now sit down and let us see if we cannot come to a better understanding, in order that this feud which has embittered our lives so long may come to an end."

Farquhar drew a chair forward and sat down, at the same time passing his hand in a troubled way across his brow. Strathdee regarded him closely with an infinite compassion, as he observed in him the traces of severe mental trouble. He also was struck, as Isabel had been, by his aged appearance: his haggard face and grey hair gave him the pathetic look of an old man.

"I should like to say to you, Ian, that it was not of my free will that I fled. My wife said there was no other course left, and she seemed to sweep everything before her; for the time being I was powerless in her hands, although I well knew what a coward's part I was taking. I am here to day without her consent; but the

mental anguish I have endured in the last weeks has been intolerable—anything would be preferable to it; and as I care nothing at all what becomes of me now, I leave myself entirely in your hands."

"Well, supposing we turn over a new leaf?" said Strathdee cheerfully. "Supposing we bury all the old differences and begin anew? Time was, Hugh, when we were happy together."

"Yes, before a woman parted us," said Farquhar bitterly. "I stole from you the woman you loved, Ian, but God knows I have never had a day's happiness since. You know as well as I that Isabel has never cared for me, and she has not scrupled to let me know it. I think that that is why I became reckless and did not seem to care what I did."

"She has not come back with you, then?" said Ian, anxious to change the subject which could only be painful to him.

"No, she never will come back to Winans, she says, as long as she lives."

"Oh, I hope we shall be able to alter that decision," said Strathdee. "I was only saying to Graham Leslie, who has been with me all

these weeks, that I was trying to screw permission out of Macphail for me to go to London. I had no object in that journey but to see you and yours, Hugh, to assure you that so far as I was concerned you could come back to Winans any day. I sent that message by Myra."

"She gave it to me. Perhaps that is why I am here. I could scarcely believe it possible that you could be in such a mind. I want to know again, Ian, what stuff you are made of?"

"I don't know," said Strathdee, with a quiet smile. "It always seems to me that there is little in this world worth losing one's temper over; it is all so ephemeral. It is the hereafter which is important. I often wonder that men so little realise that fact. Are you alone at Winans, then?"

"Yes, there is no one there except Anne Gordon, and she looked at me askance this morning as I arrived. I am like the Ishmaelite of old, every man's hand is against me."

"You have grown morbid, Hugh, dwelling on one miserable theme," said Strathdee. "Hold up your head, man, and show them all

that there is good stuff in you yet. Listen to me. I have had many thoughts, lying in this room, though it has done me good. I was to blame about the land at Port-na-carry. You shall take it back and, if you will, the whole hill for your sheep. What is to hinder you from turning it to some account? It's an occupation you have wanted all along. Will you let me draw out the whole plan I have in my head, and will you help me to work it out? It may bring peace to Winans, perhaps happiness to us all."

Hugh Farquhar rose to his feet, and his face was working convulsively as he gripped his cousin's hand.

"Let us only be as we were in the old time, Ian, that is all I care for at this present moment."

So they gripped hands in silence, wherein many deep thoughts were hid. It seemed to them that the years had rolled back, and that they were boys together again on the heather hills, without a shadow on their careless hearts. They were happier in that moment than they had been for four and twenty years.

CHAPTER XIX

IN the upper room of Christian Morison's little house in the dull Bromley street, Isabel Farquhar sat in the red light of an October afternoon. A small table was before her in the narrow window, and upon it lay some painting materials and a scroll of white velvet upon which she had been at work. In her earlier and happier years, Isabel Farquhar had had some skill with the brush, and had been able to paint flowers and even birds from nature with a singularly beautiful touch. She had used this gift solely to give pleasure to others, and sometimes to while away a dull or sad hour for herself; but now circumstances had compelled her to turn it to some sterner account. In spite of her hopes, she had not been successful in obtaining the situation for which she had applied, and as time went by she had proved that for an unfriended and

unrecommended person to seek employment in London is a hopeless task. She still remained in the haven which had been so willingly opened to her, alone. Her husband was at Winans, her daughter still in the household of the Fanes. From her son she had never received a line, although now that all apprehension was over she had written to him more than once. It was three months since that strange eventful night upon which she had taken flight from Strathdee, and though she was ready to admit that it had been a mistaken step, some stubborn quality in her nature forbade her attempting to rectify it.

The failing light had put an end to her delicate work for the day, and as she sat there leaning her head on her hands looking out upon the dreary wall of red brick opposite to her window, her face wore a bitter and almost despairing look. Her every feature seemed at that moment unbrightened by any ray of hope. Life had been hard upon Isabel Farquhar; she had been cheated of much that makes it sweet; and now in her grey middle age had nothing to look forward to but a length of lonely days, devoid of the sweeter interests of life. She

was disturbed in her sad reverie by the sound of a footstep on the stairs, a heavier foot than that of Christian Morison, who often stole up for a few minutes to try and cheer the lonely occupant of her upper room. A slight knock came to the door, and Isabel rose as she gave the usual invitation to enter, but when she saw who stood upon the threshold and immediately entered, closing the door carefully, she gave a little cry of confusion and surprise.

"Ian Strathdee!" she exclaimed, "can it be you in the flesh?"

"It is I, Isabel," he said, advancing with outstretched hand. "I should have been here long ago if I had been allowed. I only arrived in town this morning, and though I am getting on I found it absolutely necessary to rest for some hours after the journey. I hope I see you well."

As he spoke these kindly words, at the same time clasping her hand closely in his own, his eye took in every detail of her appearance. She was so sadly changed, so different from the brilliant creature who in the long-ago time had won his heart, that he found it somewhat difficult to command his voice.

"I am very well," she answered, the extreme tension of feeling giving an unusual sharpness to her tone. "I need hardly say I am glad to see you. Except that you are a little thinner you look almost like your old self."

"Oh, I have not been seriously damaged, Isabel," he answered lightly, "and all this fuss has been about nothing. Now, come, tell me what you mean by holding out like this. You must know that you will come back to Winans sooner or later, it is only a question of time. You are making everybody miserable by remaining here, and I could almost take my affidavit that you are yourself the most miserable of all."

"I don't complain," she said curtly, "and I am not going back to Winans. I told Hugh so before he left. If it pleases him to go back and face all the contumely he has so well earned he may do so, but I prefer to bear my humiliation here."

"But there isn't any contumely, Isabel," said Strathdee in the same light tones, apparently determined to treat the matter as one of small consequence. "Dear me! it is not the first time two men have tried to wipe off old scores

in a summary fashion. I can't for the life of me think what you mean by raising such a hue and cry over it."

Isabel Farquhar looked at him steadily, and a strange smile touched her lips.

"You speak like that, Ian, because you want to make it easier for me; but you know as well as I that the consequences might have been much more serious for all concerned. It was not Hugh's fault you were not left a dead man in the woods of Dee. Then think what a heritage of shame would have been left to me and to my children. I have forgiven my husband much, but I have not been able to forgive that."

"Well, to be quite frank with you, Isabel, I rather think you owe something to him for having dragged him away from Strathdee as you did. It was you who laid him open to the charge of cowardice, and it was you who incited him to escape from justice, don't forget that."

"I did what I thought was best at the time," she answered, with a touch of sullenness, "and if you had seen him that night, Ian, as I saw him, you would not be standing up so chival-

rously for him now. He has written to me, of course, that he has seen you. What did he say in that interview ?"

Strathdee's face took a softer look.

"What passed between us that day, Isabel, is in a manner sacred; but you may take it from me that the old feud is buried for ever, and that when you return to Strathdee it will be the dawn of happier days for us all."

Something in his voice awakened in the desolate woman's heart a painful longing, which seemed to communicate itself to her mobile features; her expression became softer and the hard defiant look left her eyes.

"I have not asked for your dear girl yet," said Strathdee presently. "She has been a brave and devoted daughter to you through all this trouble."

"Oh, she has," answered Isabel fervently. "If it has done nothing but this, it has shown me my child's heart, and revealed to me a depth of self-sacrifice and tenderest devotion which I could not have believed her to possess. I will own to you, Ian, that sometimes for Myra's sake I have been tempted to swallow my pride and go back to Winans."

Strathdee regarded her with a look of the kindliest sympathy, and when he spoke his voice had a pleading note in it.

"If you would but obey the dictates of your heart, Isabel, you would be a happier woman. It is not for me to pass any strictures on your conduct, or to say what you should or should not do, but you will at least believe that I would only advise you as a disinterested friend."

"If I cannot believe that after all that has passed, Ian, I should be ungrateful indeed," she said quickly. "I want to come. This place with its stony streets and pitiless crowds is killing me, but somehow I cannot—something keeps me back."

A look of intense pity crossed the face of Ian Strathdee. He knew her well, the pride high enough to reach the heavens, the stubborn will, the implacable bitterness of her race which, once roused, could scarcely be pacified again. What could he do to bring her to some softer mood?

"I think if you would but allow your heart to guide you, Isabel," he said gently, "you would never regret it. Hugh is waiting at

Winans; he wanted to come with me and has often wanted to come during the last few months, but I have restrained him. I said that it would be better to leave you for a time, and that I should like to see you first. Will you promise me at least to consider what I have said?"

"I will try, Ian, but it is hard," she said. "I believe that Hugh is sorry for what has happened, but what guarantee have I that his penitence will be lasting, or that my life will be less hard than it has been all these years?"

"Everything lies in your hands now, Isabel, you may take my word for that. If you will but be your best self, and less hard upon Hugh, I think you may yet be happy. I have no right to reproach you, but I do think that part of the burden of your past unhappiness undoubtedly rests with you."

She bit her lip: his reproach stung her all the more sharply because she knew in her innermost heart that it was not undeserved.

"I have tried to do my duty," she said stiffly. "Even Hugh Farquhar will not dare to say otherwise."

"No one will deny that, but we all know that it is possible for those who do their duty to be rather unpleasant to live with at times," he said, giving a home-thrust with a slight smile. It was not pleasant to him to say these things to the woman he had so passionately loved, and in whom he still retained a tender interest, but he believed that it was right that he should say them, since no one had ever yet dared to speak the truth to Isabel Farquhar.

"I am particularly anxious that all the old differences should be healed, Isabel," he said presently, "because I have in view a great and happy change in my own life."

"What is that?" she asked, looking at him with a sudden quick interest.

"You have not heard, of course, but I am sure that you will wish me joy, Isabel, when I tell you that I hope to marry my cousin Graham Leslie before Christmas."

She turned away from him, and began to gather up with a somewhat nervous hand the materials with which she had been working at the table.

"Surely this is very sudden?" she said, and the hard note had returned to her voice. "I

think I have heard you say before now that you would not care to marry her."

"Ah, we say many things, especially in our foolish youth, Isabel, that we live to regret, simply because a clearer vision comes to us. I have misjudged Graham Leslie for a great many years, just as I think you have misjudged Hugh. But we understand each other at last, and my only regret is that we should have been apart so long."

"She will be a happy woman," said Isabel, with a faint smile in which there was perhaps a slight tinge of scorn. "We all know that that has been the desire of her heart for many years."

"You are hard upon us all, Isabel," said Strathdee, slightly disappointed, "but I know that it is your other self that is uppermost at present, and that by-and-by you will be won to a kindlier thought. Graham is in London at present, she came up with Lady Cameron about three weeks ago. They are going to Algiers next month; it is probable that the wedding will take place there. She sent her love to you and begged me to ask whether she might come and see you."

"Not here," answered Isabel, "I could not bear under the circumstances to see Graham Leslie here."

She spoke with so much decision that Strathdee forbore to press the matter, and presently he took his leave, feeling much disappointed over the result of the interview, and not at all hopeful of its final issue.

"You will think over what I have said, Isabel," he said at parting. "Remember that it is a vital matter to many—to Hugh first of all, then to your children, whom you have deprived of a home. Remember last of all, to me and to Graham."

"You are unkind, Ian, trying to shift the blame from Hugh's shoulders to mine," she said passionately. "But yes, I will think it over and let you know what I decide."

When he was gone she turned the key in her door in order that she might not be further disturbed, and throwing herself on the couch buried her face in the cushions. The news of Ian Strathdee's approaching marriage had given her a great blow, and she did not even trouble to disguise from herself the fact that it had been some comfort to her heart, as

well as to her pride, that he had so long remained unmarried for her sake. But she had been quick enough to gather from the tones of his voice and the look in his eyes as he spoke of his cousin Graham, that the old passion had died in his heart, and that his whole heart was now given to her. Perhaps that was the bitterest moment she had yet endured, yet out of it arose a determination which helped her in what was undoubtedly a crisis in her life. Pride came to her rescue. She told herself she would show Ian Strathdee, and the proud woman of his choice, that she was independent of them.

We are strange and complex creatures, mostly at the mercy of our own moods and fancies. The announcement of Strathdee's approaching marriage entirely changed Isabel Farquhar's outlook on life.

CHAPTER XX

It was quite dark in the room when she heard another footstep on the stairs, followed by a gentle knock at the door, while Christian's voice begged admittance. Somewhat ungraciously Isabel unlocked the door and bade her come in.

"Mr. Blake is downstairs, Mrs. Farquhar, and would like to see you. Can I bring him up?"

"What can he want with me?" she said rather snappishly. "I have had enough of visitors for one day, Christian, and scarcely feel equal to another one."

"I can tell him that," said Christian sympathetically. "I daresay he can look in again, he is often here."

"Did he seem anxious about it, Christian?"

"Well, ma'am, I think he did."

"Tell him to come up, then; I may as well see what he wants."

Isabel had not yet had speech with Barron Blake, although she knew him by sight, and also knew that Myra saw him very often at the house of Mrs. Fane. She had been so entirely engrossed with her own personal feelings, that she had failed to notice anything unusual in Myra's manner when she spoke of Blake, so that she was totally unprepared for the errand on which he had come. She had long been a sincere admirer of Blake's genius, and in happier circumstances the thought of meeting one whose powers raised him so far above the common run of humanity would have added a pleasant zest to life. But she betrayed no elation or even interest; her only feeling at the moment, perhaps, was one of irritation that she should have to receive him in so poor a place. The knowledge that the whole circumstances of the past months had not been hid from him by Myra, while it made the position perhaps less awkward in some respects, yet seemed to accentuate her attitude of defiance. She had no doubt at all in her mind that Myra had sent him to urge

upon her the advisability of going back to Scotland.

When Blake entered the room she was standing by the table, her fine commanding figure drawn to its full height; her beautiful face, wearing a somewhat hard and defiant look, was turned expectantly to the door, and she merely inclined her head as she bade him a somewhat curt good-evening.

For a moment his accustomed readiness of address deserted him. He had come upon a personal errand of sufficient moment to make him anxious to produce a favourable impression, yet for the moment he felt entirely at a loss how to open up the subject.

"I have to apologise for this intrusion," he began in the most commonplace manner. "I suppose your daughter has not prepared you in any way for this visit?"

"No, she has not," replied Mrs. Farquhar, rather stiffly. "I have not seen her for several days, but I am pleased to see you. Won't you sit down?"

"Presently, perhaps. I had hoped also to have seen Mr. Farquhar here," said Blake

quietly, "but I understand that he is still in Scotland."

"He is, and I do not think there is any likelihood of his return," she answered, wondering what he could have to say concerning them both.

"I hardly know how to explain myself or my errand, Mrs. Farquhar," said Blake. "I can only hope that it will not come entirely as a surprise. You are aware, of course, that during the last few months I have had the happiness of seeing a good deal of your daughter."

"I know that you are a constant visitor at the house where she is employed," said Mrs. Farquhar, regarding him steadily. "I also know that she has told you a good deal about the private affairs of her family. I felt inclined—naturally, you will admit—to resent that at first, although it was entirely owing to you that we discovered each other so soon. For that I, at least, was not altogether ungrateful."

"That was a small matter," said Blake, with a smile, "at least in comparison with the interest I felt. Well, I will not beat about the

bush. I have come here to-day to ask you for your daughter's hand."

These words fell somewhat formally from Blake's lips. His own heart, which a happy love had made soft and tender towards all humanity, was filled with unspeakable tenderness for the driven and desolate woman before him, but somehow she seemed to freeze him, and make him fear to appear ridiculous in her eyes. An immeasurable surprise dawned upon Isabel Farquhar's face, and for the moment she could scarcely believe that she had heard aright. That a man so distinguished both by birth and talents should be so far interested in Myra, especially since she had become an obscure dependent, was against all her cherished convictions concerning the selfishness and pride of the world.

"Do you mean to say that you wish to marry my daughter?" she asked; and at the incredulousness of her voice and look Blake could not forbear a smile.

"That is the honour I covet," he answered gravely. "I am happy to tell you, though perhaps you may not thank me for it, that

Myra herself has wished me success in my errand to-day."

"You have spoken to Myra, then?" she said hastily. "But have you considered it well? She is nobody, she has nothing. You are even aware of the unfortunate circumstances in which we are at present placed."

"I am; but what of that?" he said quickly. "It is Myra I want. The circumstances in which she is placed are of no account to me. I love her, and if you will give her to me I promise you that I will do my utmost to make her happy."

"But you," she faltered. "You are well born. You are rich and famous. I cannot understand what attraction my poor girl can have for such as you. I remember your mother, Mr. Blake, in the old days when I was a happy girl in Lowndes Square: what will she say to such a poor alliance for the son of whom she is justly proud?"

"I have no secrets from my mother, Mrs. Farquhar, nor have I even taken this step without her knowledge and consent. I can assure you that she will place no obstacles in my way."

"She knows, then, that I have fallen on evil days since I lived in the house of Lady Lundie?" said Isabel quickly. "I will have nothing kept back from her, nor would I allow my daughter, poor and obscure though she may be, to become an unwelcome member of any family."

"You may accept my assurance, Mrs. Farquhar," said Blake quietly. "My mother will write to you and tell you so herself."

"I can't understand it," said Isabel Farquhar musingly. "I was only sitting here before you came in, Mr. Blake, thinking myself forgotten by God and man," she said, with a strange passion in her voice. "Tell me—no doubt since you have won the child's heart she has talked to you without restraint—are you one of those who blame me because—because I am here?" she added almost fiercely.

"I have no right either to judge or to blame," answered Blake. "But it would make many happy if you would return to Scotland."

"I have had Lord Strathdee here this afternoon," she said suddenly. "Perhaps Myra also knows that."

"No, she does not, for I have only come from her now," answered Blake. "Did he also urge upon you the duty of returning to Scotland?"

"Oh yes, that is what he came for," she said with a faint sarcastic smile. "I suppose I shall have to go back sooner or later, since the tide of opinion is so much in favour of it. I do not relish the prospect, I assure you."

They were silent a moment, with an awkward silence, which Blake scarcely knew how to break. He saw that she was in a highly-strung condition, and believed that a nervous breakdown sooner or later was inevitable. He had seldom met a woman who interested him more; his eye, trained to the study of human character and motive, saw the proud reserved nature struggling against circumstances which were proving too strong for it. Isabel Farquhar was a woman who, by reason of the very strength and intensity of her nature, must be a stranger to the happiness which is within the reach of more ordinary mortals. She expected too much from life, her intense passionate nature exacted more than those about her could pay, consequently disappointment had followed her

persistently through all the years of her married life. Had she only resigned herself to the inevitable, and brought the philosophic spirit to bear upon the conditions of her life, there is no doubt she would have been happier herself, and made existence more tolerable for those she influenced.

She was swift to divine, at least in part, what was passing in Blake's mind.

"I know what you are thinking," she said, with a slightly melancholy smile, "that I am a dreadful woman. I wonder that you are not afraid to risk your own happiness in my daughter's keeping."

A look of unspeakable tenderness lightened Blake's grave face.

"I have seen how she bears misfortunes," he answered simply, "that is enough for me. Have I then your permission to regard the matter as settled, and may I write to Mr. Farquhar?"

"Yes, you may. I am glad to think that my daughter has the prospect of such a settlement in life, and that her happiness is likely to be of a more enduring quality than mine has been."

She held out her hand as she spoke these

words. Blake, strangely moved, although he could not have told why, raised it to his lips.

"I thank you," he said simply. "My gratitude will best be shown by my future actions. I promise you that so far as it lies in the power of any man, I will do my utmost to make your daughter happy."

"I have no fear for her," she answered, and an unbidden tear rose in her eye. "Myra will be content with less than I have been. She will not ask so much from life."

Blake was struck by her words, which embodied his own thought. As she exhibited no desire to prolong the interview, he felt that he had no excuse to remain.

"I am going back to Myra now," he said. "There is no other message?"

She turned from him a moment to the still uncurtained window, from which she could only now see the tall trees waving above the roofs. In a moment a struggle rose in her mind. She knew what message would make Myra happy, why should she hold out longer? Blake waited, perhaps conscious of the brief conflict.

"You may tell her if you like," she said suddenly, "that after I have seen her to-morrow I am going back to Winans."

* * * * *

A wild rain had swept Strathdee from dawn to dusk; the great hills were hidden in the folds of a cold impenetrable mist; the waters of Loch Winans were lashed by the bitter wind into an angry sea. Few cared to be abroad; even the most ardent sportsman had been driven in from the hills early in the day. Just before dusk, however, a solitary figure, with a gun over his shoulder and followed by a faithful dog, came up by the loch-side towards the old house of Winans. All day he had been on the sodden moors, and his bag was full. He returned now simply because the darkness drove him in, although no welcome awaited him there, nothing but the prospect of a long solitary evening by the deserted hearth. If Hugh Farquhar had sinned, no man could say that his punishment was lacking, or that there was anything in his lot to be envied.

He saw a light in the sitting-room as he approached the door, but it did not excite his wonder or curiosity, and he passed unnoticed

into the house and up to his dressing-room to lay aside his wet garments, all unconscious of what awaited him below. He dressed in a leisurely fashion, looking forward perhaps with some melancholy pleasure to the solitary meal which awaited him. A long day on the moors in a driving easterly wind can whet a man's appetite as nothing else will. When he at last descended the stairs and entered the sitting-room the lamps were lit, and a cheerful fire blazed and crackled in the wide chimneypiece, giving to the place a homely and pleasant aspect grateful to the heart of a tired and hungry man. These things he noted on the threshold and then stood still, for there was a figure sitting by the hearth so like the wife who was seldom absent from his thoughts that a superstitious fear momentarily clutched his heart lest he saw some apparition which portended evil.

"Don't look so scared, Hugh," she said as she rose, "I am not a ghost, but flesh and blood. No doubt I ought to have written, but I took it into my head all of a sudden to come back, and there was no time to write." She rose to her feet as she uttered these words; he

took a step forward into the room, and so they faced each other in silence for a moment, the husband and wife who had been so long estranged, and who had tasted so little happiness in their married life. He was at a loss what to say: her tone was friendly, and there was something in her expression which awakened his surprise. She looked tired and pale, but her eye was less keen and hard, her mouth had lost the stern sarcastic curve which he had been wont to fear.

"I see you hardly believe it yet, Hugh," she said. "Perhaps it wants a word of explanation, and I may as well give it now. I have been a fool to stay so long in London; I have seen that all along, but somehow I could not give in. I suppose you know that I have seen Strathdee?"

"I know, of course, that he went to London for that purpose," Farquhar replied.

"I don't know that what he said would have decided me, but something has happened to Myra. Barron Blake wants to marry her. Has he written to you?"

"Not yet," answered Farquhar, more and more surprised.

"Well, when I came to think over matters, I came to the conclusion that it would be better for many reasons that I should come back. The Blakes are a very good family; it is an excellent marriage for her, Hugh, far better than we might have expected; it is the first piece of good luck which has ever befallen us. It would not be right for me to stand in the way of her happiness, and of course the position I had voluntarily placed myself in became impossible, so I have come back."

"I need hardly say that I am glad to see you back on any pretext whatever," Farquhar said somewhat formally.

A faint dreary smile flickered for a moment on her sad mouth.

"It is very kind of you to say that, Hugh, because I have not treated you so well that you should be glad to see me. I am willing, if you will allow me, to make another attempt. Perhaps after this strange upheaval we may be able to settle down and understand each other a little better than we have ever done."

Farquhar could scarcely believe that he heard aright. Her words awakened in him a strange emotion. He suddenly sat down at

the table and dropped his head on his hands. She regarded him steadfastly for a moment with a great remorse, noting the slightly rounded shoulders, the whitening hair at the temples, the attitude of depression, and there awakened in her heart, perhaps for the first time, a strange tenderness towards this man who had erred much, but whom she had hindered rather than helped in the upward way.

"Don't do that, Hugh," she said almost appealingly. "You make me feel that I have been greatly to blame. I know I have, though it is hard upon me to admit it; but let us begin again, let us both take a leaf out of Strathdee's book and try and make the best of what is left to us." Her hand fell on his shoulder: she felt it thrill him, but a minute passed before he raised his head. When he did so and saw her eyes full of tears he rose and folded his arms close about her. It was the first time in many years he had dared do it. Isabel Farquhar suffered her tired head to rest there, and an indescribable sweetness stole into her riven heart.

"I have been a poor wife to you, after all,

Hugh," she said falteringly, " though my pride has been high enough to reach the heavens. We have both made many mistakes; let us begin again. We are getting old, and I at least have proved that now I have no life apart from you."

"My poor wife!" said Hugh Farquhar brokenly, and his clasp seemed to tell all the love his lips could not speak. So, though late, a promise of the happiness their own hands had dispelled came to these two by their long-desolate hearth. And though the wild wind moaned and the rain wept without, a gleam of summer sunshine seemed to warm the old house on the shore of Loch Winans. Tender thoughts, holy aspirations, throbbing hopes were there, and Love, long absent, spread her white wings in peace above that lonely dwelling.

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